

THE INTERPRETATION OF COMINGTEE PLANTATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a long term preservation plan for Comingtee Plantation, located at the confluence of the east and west branch of the Cooper River in Berkeley County, South Carolina. The plantation, owned by the Ball Family for almost two hundred years, includes the ruins of an eighteenth- century house, a nineteenth-century rice mill, as well as yet undiscovered archaeological resources. The site is owned by the Department of Natural Resources, a state agency, and is accessible to the public, though use is generally limited to hunting activities. During the summer of 2006 I participated in an internship project with Historic Charleston Foundation in which we documented the buildings and submitted a report to the Department of Natural Resources. The report includes archival research, measured drawings and suggested immediate actions that should be taken to prevent any further deterioration. Currently there is no plan for the care, rehabilitation or interpretation of the structures or site. In all likelihood the cultural landscape will continue to deteriorate and the site will only be preserved as a conservation resource and for use as a hunting ground. With that in mind I have attempted to propose an alternate use for the site that would inspire a broad audience.

The written portion of this thesis reflects the research of five main themes. First is a discussion of the ruin as an art form, of how ruins are interpreted through historical memory, and how they can be interpreted as part of a symbolic landscape. Second, significant historical themes are addressed. Third, case studies are provided to introduce diverse philosophies for interpreting historic sites. Fourth, cultural

heritage management and cultural tourism are discussed as means of maintaining and providing an audience for the site. Finally, a conservation plan for the rice mill is included in order to provide a record of early building technology and guidance for repairs and maintenance.

This thesis will propose that Comingtee Plantation be used as a site to interpret and publicly display artifacts excavated from the entire region of the Cooper River National Historic District. The mission of the center will be to provide accurate representation of the Cooper River plantation system as it functioned in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with a focus on African and African-American lifestyles. The methodology of the center will be to retrieve data and publish the findings in a scholarly manner.

I elected to pursue a design exercise to explore the challenges of developing new buildings in an historic context and to create an appropriate aesthetic for my proposed research and interpretive center. The program for the archaeological center creates a viable use for Comingtee Plantation with laboratory and office space, an interpretive museum, and an educational space.

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CHAPTER ONE

PHILISOPHICAL INTERPRETATION

A building that is no longer viable for human habitation can still be maintained as a cultural resource. Sites with ruins, such as Comingtee, can evoke emotion and inspire the imagination. This chapter discusses historical memory, symbolic landscapes, and architectural ruins as part of interpreted cultural landscapes in an attempt to provide reasons for preserving a ruin.

Historical Memory

It is human nature to look back and learn from the past. The discipline of history relies on the past and uses it to construct hypotheses about what may occur in the future. David Lowenthal argues that “Awareness of the past is essential to the maintenance of purpose in life. Without it we would lack all sense of continuity...all knowledge of our own identity.”¹ The act of preserving the past, however, is not valid according to W. Brown Morton. He contends that “we cannot preserve the past, only the present for the future.”² The idea of being aware of the past and preserving the present seems to provide a middle ground that has room for reflection as well as growth.

Major events are often remembered with overall similarity, but particular details are recalled differently. For example, everyone remembers that the World Trade Center towers fell on September 11, 2001, but Americans have individual

¹ Lowenthal, David, “Age and Artifact: Dilemmas of Appreciation,” The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes, D.W. Meinig, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) 103.

² W. Brown Morton III, “Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Structures,” lecture, College of Charleston, 22 March 2007.

memories of where they were and what they were doing at the time. The process of sharing memories, good or bad, is how we create our own historical memory. By telling stories that will be shared for generations we are adding to the historical memories of future generations.³ David Thelen, in his article entitled “Memory and American History” states that “the challenge of history is to recover the past and introduce it to the present.”⁴ With so many interpretive possibilities the challenge is determining which past to introduce. In the field of preservation the most thorough interpretations strive to illustrate many layers of history.

Slavery and Historical Memory

Comingtee Plantation would not have existed without chattel slavery and therefore the “peculiar institution” should be at the forefront of the study of plantation life. This section will focus on the way slavery has been remembered and interpreted and how increased knowledge has led to more accurate representations.

For most of the twentieth century the plantation landscape was portrayed with an emphasis on white planters while the issue of slavery was mentioned briefly or left out completely. In the past the planter’s house was the only interpreted aspect of the site because it was often the only structure still standing and was the central symbol of the plantation landscape. Confirmation of the slave lifestyle was less evident, often physically underground and accessible only by archaeological excavations which did not occur on slave sites until the 1970s.⁵

³ Thelen, David, “Memory and American History,” The Journal of American History, 75 (1989): 1118.

⁴ Thelen 1117.

⁵ There were several reasons for the shift to a concentration of African-American archaeology, according to Theresa Singleton, “The Archaeology of Slavery in North America,” 24(1995): 119-140. Contributing philosophies were black activism and the Civil Rights Movement, historic preservation legislation, a new

The misrepresentation of enslaved people is a consequence of two factors, the circumstances of the enslaved and misinformed twentieth century historians. The uncontrollable circumstance of being enslaved and being denied the facility to learn reading and writing resulted in a paucity of available evidence about slave lifestyles, habits, and building traditions. Most slaves were illiterate and left no written record making the interpretation of their lives challenging and, at times, speculative. The records that do exist were often written by slave owners and generally reflect their own opinions towards blacks.

The way slavery was addressed in college textbooks between 1865 and the 1970s illustrates how fallacies have been perpetuated throughout historical memory. In his 1949 article “Common Distortions in the Textbook Treatment of Slavery,” historian Jack Abramowitz uses several direct quotes from college level textbooks to illustrate that the bulk of available information about slavery was inaccurate. In addition to inaccuracies concerning the lifestyles of slaves the textbooks were also biased, only representing one point of view. Abramowitz states “Virtually, all these texts go to extreme lengths to present slavery as a paternalistic system and some authors in explaining slavery, engage in expositions of logic which defy understanding through the normal channels of rational thought.”⁶

Currently historians are working to bring about change in the way students learn about slavery. Textbooks of the past twenty years have incorporated scholarship which emphasizes slave culture and community, but more recent

archaeological interest in ethnic groups, and the use of archaeology in the interpretation of historic sites. Earlier efforts had been focused on the recovery of artifacts related to the planter's house and corresponding gardens.

⁶ Abramowitz, Jack, “Curriculum Distortions in the Textbook Treatment of Slavery,” The Journal of Negro Education, 18 (1949): 16.

scholarship is not yet integrated, leaving a gap between past and present theory.⁷ The weakness in college survey textbooks today is not the way slavery is interpreted but a “failure to convey a sense of slavery as a subject of extraordinary historical research, debate, and reinterpretation...and in failing to [do so] the texts miss a major opportunity to expose students to what history is all about...”⁸ Reliance on a combination of traditional textbooks, scholarly books such as Philip Morgan’s “Slave Counterpoint,” and current internet sources produced by such reputable organizations as PBS and Colonial Williamsburg provide a more comprehensive viewpoint.⁹

Symbolic landscapes

The term “symbolic landscape” is an abstraction that represents how people feel about a certain place. The symbols can be deeply personal, nationally significant or somewhere in between. A backyard garden may be a symbolic landscape to an individual whereas the White House is symbolic to an entire country. Symbolic landscapes are frequently generic places such as “main street” or “small town America.” They represent the past the present and the future.

Plantations are a symbolic landscape of the American South and slaves were the face of that landscape. Most people still associate plantations with slavery.¹⁰ Indeed the blacks on plantations created their own landscapes far different from that

⁷ Kolchin, Peter, “Slavery in United States Survey Textbooks,” The Journal of American History, 84 (1998):1425-1438.

⁸ Kolchin 1435.

⁹ Orwell, Russell, “New Views of Slavery: Using Recent Historical Work to Promote Critical Thinking about the “Peculiar Institution,” The History Teacher, 34 (2001), 459.

¹⁰ A survey was conducted that asked 40 people of different educational and geographical backgrounds what they associated with the word “plantation”. Twenty of the 40 people questioned said they associated plantations with slavery. The second most common answer was “a large house with fields and crops”. Survey conducted by email in February, 2007.

of the white planters (male or female) that controlled their lives. The Africans that were brought to this country as a result of the slave trade essentially created a new culture that was all their own. John Michael Vlach makes an important point when he states that “the creation of slave landscapes was one of the strategies employed by blacks to make slavery survivable.”¹¹ Blacks did not have a choice whether or not they were enslaved but they did manage to create their own communities from which they derived their sense of place.

Perception of Architectural Ruins

For centuries, people have been drawn to architectural ruins. While individuals have different memories of past events, they also reshape tangible pieces of the past, such as a ruin, in different ways. “Each spectator is forced to supply the missing pieces from his or her own imagination and a ruin therefore appears different to everyone.”¹² Christopher Woodward uses the Roman Colosseum to illustrate his point that incompleteness stimulates the imagination and offers examples of poems and novels written by famous authors such as Edgar Allen Poe and Henry James who described the Colosseum and the atmosphere that it created in their works and provided the reader with just enough illumination to construct their own picture of the ruin. Even Adolf Hitler was mesmerized by the ruins of ancient Rome ordering all Third Reich buildings be constructed of stone and marble to

¹¹ Vlach, John M, Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993) 1.

¹² Woodward, Christopher, In Ruins, (New York: Pantheon, 2001) 15.

ensure that the ruins would some day resemble those he saw in Italy and remind people of his former dominance.¹³

What makes an architectural ruin so compelling? Ruins are the evidence that nothing lasts forever yet their very appearance inspires feelings of wonder and transcendence. The word 'aging' has negative connotations in American culture, but we, along with other civilizations, are moved by man-made objects that have withstood the test of time, damaged or not. However, there is a point when a deteriorated building is no longer effective for conjuring feelings of spirituality or wonder; when it takes more than a vivid imagination to complete the picture. These deteriorated buildings are often lost and if undocumented they will vanish from historical memory. The buildings at Comingtee are in this condition and as they are it is difficult to conjure any feeling of their previous existence (Figure 1.1).

The Art of Ruins

The ruin is frequently depicted in art demonstrating the current views held by diverse cultures during different periods. In painting, the subject of ruins was first used to depict the birthplace of Christ and the replacement of the classical world by the Christian era. The stable and surrounding ruins were used to indicate the modest beginnings of Jesus in works such as Botticelli's *Adoration of the Magi* or the painting by Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippi of the same name (Figures 1.2, 1.3).¹⁴ Renaissance artists used the ruins left by previous cultures to inspire their architecture and many important treatises and pattern books resulted. Architects such as Alberti, Serlio, and Palladio used the physical models of ancient Greek and

¹³ Woodward 29.

¹⁴ Zucker, Paul, "Ruins-An Aesthetic Hybrid," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 20 (1961): 120.

Roman ruins to create their modern interpretations of ancient architectural masterpieces.



Figure 1.1
Comingtee House
Photo by Author



Figure 1.2
The Adoration of the Magi by Botticelli
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

In the seventeenth century ruins became the subjects of paintings and the dichotomies between light and shadow and nature and man were romanticized. The eighteenth century “represents the climax of the widespread interest in ruins, now seen essentially as elements of landscape rather than as architecture, and the romantic approach prevails.”¹⁵ The purpose of the eighteenth century painter of ruins was to instill a feeling of transience and remind us that nothing last forever.

“If there is one figure whose stature overshadows every other in the art of depicting ruins that he transfigures and elevates to the heights of the Sublime, it is Giovanni Battista Piranesi”.¹⁶ Piranesi, active in the mid-eighteenth century, is considered the master of depicting ruins and making them magnificent. He was inspired by his native Italy and his spirit was captured by Rome. His engravings generally focus on architectural details and seem heavy, contemplative, and romantic. Through his works one can visualize the greatness of the former Roman Empire and imagine its resurrection (Figure 1.4).

As in Piranesi’s work there is a romanticism that surrounds the South Carolina Lowcountry and the city of Charleston. There is a fascination with what remains and with what does not. Few other cities in America have been ravaged by as much destruction as Charleston, South Carolina. There have been fires, wars, hurricanes, tornadoes and one particularly devastating earthquake yet a very high proportion of colonial architecture remains. Charleston may be a city of survivors but not all of the remaining architecture is habitable. Colonial and nineteenth century ruins are scattered all around the area and people seem to be content to leave

¹⁵ Zucker 122.

¹⁶ Makarius, Mikel, Ruins, (Paris: Flammarion, 2004) 97.

them as they are, as a reminder of a fallen empire, while the new south grows up around them.

The English Landscape Garden

The English landscape garden, or picturesque, movement of the eighteenth century made ruins fashionable. The theory behind the design of English gardens rejected the sobering symmetry and geometry of early eighteenth century French landscapes and replaced them with more natural forms, including false ruins with overgrown vegetation.¹⁷ In landscape gardens the allure was that nature was taking over, but only as much as man would allow. William Gilpin, a German artist and aesthetician, noted the qualities of picturesque as “variety of viewpoint, contrast in texture, effects of light and shade, irregularity of form and mystery” and fostered the notion that those qualities should “affect the emotional state of the beholder and stimulate his imagination.” The landscape garden was certainly more than just beauty.

¹⁷ Makarius 120.



Figure 1.3
 The Adoration of the Magi by Fra Angelico and
 Fra Filippo Lippi
 National Gallery of Art,
 Washington,DC



Figure 1.4
 Tempio di Pola in Istria by Giovanni Battista Piranesi
www.rareart.com/photos/piranest2.jpg

The introduction of the false ruin is attributed to Batty Langley in his treatise, *New Principles of Gardening*, in 1728. The concept spread to other parts of Europe such as Sweden and Germany, finally making its way to France by the late eighteenth century.¹⁸ Picturesque gardens often contained false ruins that served multiple purposes. The fascination with ruins was drawn from the desire to understand the “impact of history on the living” yet they also served as decoration and as places of contemplation, much like their authentic precedents.¹⁹

The English landscape gardening tradition did not translate well to the southern American colonies according to noted landscape architect Norman Newton. In fact the plantation landscape of the south was rather a reversion to English Renaissance design that featured strong geometry and rigid organization, a necessity where the primary focus was money. Certainly southern planters were not constructing false ruins. The English landscape garden did however find its place in the northern colonies by the early nineteenth century through the influence of Andrew Jackson Downing and others.²⁰

¹⁸ Makarius 125.

¹⁹ Zucker 119.

²⁰ Newton, Norman, *Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971) 250.

CHAPTER TWO THEMES OF SIGNIFICANCE

Architecture

There are two significant remaining buildings on the Comingtee property representing distinct periods in the history of American architecture and construction. The plantation house was built in 1738, the colonial period, and is an important example of pre-1750 construction techniques. It was built as a single family residence and continued in that capacity until 1949. The architectural features include solid brick English bond construction, grapevine tuck pointed masonry joints (Figure 2.1), a pattern of glazed headers on the belt course (Figure 2.2), and mortise and tenon door and window frames.

Although the floor plan is no longer recognizable a written account of the house states that it was room deep and two rooms wide with the door opening into the larger of the two front rooms.²¹ This type of floor plan is often thought to be the pre-cursor to the typical center hall plan that is locally prevalent.

Two photos taken in 1940 provide evidence of a relatively modest interior that was common in country houses of the period (Figure 2.3, 2.4).²² At least one of the fireplace walls had a simple fireplace surround with bolection moulding and an overmantel that was typical of the early Georgian period in the Lowcountry.

²¹ Ball, Nanna Shand, 1893-1988, Nan S. Ball Papers, 1895-1988, (369.02.02) South Carolina Historical Society.

²² Stoney, Samuel, "Plantations of the Carolina Low Country", (Toronto: General Publishing Company, 1938) 166. Plantation owners commonly reserved the high style details and expense for their houses in town.

According to Samuel Stoney, author of *Plantations of the Carolina Low Country*, they were original features of the house.²³ Little else is known about the interior.



Figure 2.1
Grape vine tuck pointed joint
Photo by author, 2006



Figure 2.2
Glazed header pattern
Photo by author, 2006

²³ Ibid 62.



Figure 2.3
Comingtee House Interior, 1940
Photo by HABS located at
<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query>



Figure 2.4
Comingtee House Interior, 1940
Photo by HABS located at
<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query>

The rice mill located on the portion of the plantation called Stoke was built approximately one hundred years later, in the late 1820s or early 1830s and is the last extant on the Cooper River (Figure 2.5).²⁴ There is evidence that the mill was in operation in the early 1830s and this is one consideration for the approximate date of construction.²⁵ There are also architecture cues that lead to this conclusion such as the brick bond; three course common bond which was generally not used in the Lowcountry until the 1830s, and the color and size of the brick, larger and more reddish brown in color with iron spots, suggest that it is much later than that of Comingtee house.²⁶

Agriculture

The socio-economic system at Comingtee plantation was based on the cultivation of rice. Rice was grown on both Comingtee and Stoke plantations and it was milled on Stoke plantation. Rice was the most important staple crop of the Lowcountry by 1720 and brought extreme riches to the few who could afford to plant in large quantities. For over one hundred fifty years high quality Carolina Gold rice was shipped from Carolina to ports all over the world including locations in England and the Mediterranean.

²⁴ This is an estimation based on the building type and type and quality of materials according to Richard Marks. A 1786 plat (Charleston County, RMC Plat Book D Page 185) of the property shows a settlement in the area of the current rice mill with a building that is denoted as the “machine house.” It is possible that an older mill was demolished when the current one was built or that there was no earlier mill. A specific date for the current mill will require further study of the materials.

²⁵ Ball, John, 1760-1817, John Ball Papers, 1680-1840 (1134.02.01), South Carolina Historical Society. Thomas Finklea, the overseer at Stoke wrote a letter to John Ball in November of 1833 stating that he had “near all [the rice] in the mill.”

²⁶ Richard Marks, Personal Communication, 7 July 2006.



Figure 2.5
Stoke Rice Mill
Photo by author

The method of growing rice was perfected over several decades and with much experimentation. The first crops were planted in vast systems of inland swamps. Inland swamp planting evolved to work alongside and then was surpassed by tidal cultivation which required a system of dikes, canals, and gates to provide irrigation. Both systems required a tremendous amount of slave labor for field preparation, planting, cultivation, and harvesting.

The task system of Carolina plantations, unlike the gang system employed by planters in other southern regions, provided the slaves a small amount of autonomy which they used to their advantage. This system required that a certain amount of work was to be completed every day, and this was referred to as a “task.” An example of a task might be weeding one quarter acre of a rice field or digging one hundred feet of trench. After the task was completed the slave was free to do as he wished, within parameters. Many slaves planted their own crops and sold them at the market, to other slaves, or back to the masters themselves.²⁷

Archaeology

Comingtee has the potential to yield large amounts of archaeological evidence from the time of Native Americans to the post-Bellum period. The evidence would likely provide insight into the lives of both the Ball family and their slaves. When most of the above ground evidence is gone, archaeology is often the only way to glean important information. Therefore archaeological survey testing

²⁷ Morgan, Philip, “Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880,” William and Mary Quarterly, 39(1982)563-599.

should be performed in order to determine whether or not the site would yield further information.²⁸

In order to discover how Comingtee plantation functioned as a landscape it is essential to understand the arrangement of buildings and grounds. Traditionally plantations had barns, slave quarters, kitchen houses, cooper shops, corn cribs, stables, privies and overseer's houses. There are two themes that can be derived from the knowledge of building placement. One is an understanding of the settlement pattern of Comingtee in relation to other similar plantation landscapes and the other is to identify and understand the objects that enslaved people used in their everyday lives, leading to an understanding of daily behaviors.²⁹

Settlement patterns on plantations are derived from two different types of agrarian management systems. The first is an unsupervised method and the second is a distinct pattern of hierarchy.³⁰ According to archaeologist J.W. Joseph, early colonial plantations were highly isolated and the workers had a great degree of autonomy. During that period slaves lived in isolated villages with little interaction with whites. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, as plantation owners began to fear slave insurrection, a pattern of hierarchy emerged and manifested itself in the arrangement of plantation architecture.³¹ Slave villages were located near the main house in an orderly arrangement of streets that could be monitored by the owner or the overseer. Comingtee probably took the form of the latter given the evidence on

²⁸ Shovel tests should be conducted where there is known evidence of activity such as around the house and mill or sites that are listed on the 1786 plat of the plantation such as the slave street or kitchen building.

²⁹ Joseph, J.W., "Building to Grow: Agrarian Adaptations to South Carolina's Historical Landscapes," Carolina's Historical Landscapes, Ed. Linda Stine, Martha Zierden, Leslie Drucker, and Christopher Judge, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997) 45.

³⁰ Joseph 46.

³¹ Joseph 46.

the aforementioned 1786 plat that shows straight rows of slave quarters within sight of the main house (Figures 2.6, 2.7, 2.8).

Enslaved Africans and African Americans on plantations created their own culture based on their African heritage and their need to adapt to their new circumstances. Their speech, dress, food preparation, house types and other cultural traits were a mix of what they had experienced in their home country and what was available to them in America. One of the most telling artifacts typically left behind by former slaves were pieces of pottery called Colono ware. Colono ware, according to Leland Ferguson, is a low-fired pottery often produced by Native Americans or people of African descent.³² Its appearance on a plantation landscape often leads to discoveries about the food choices of slaves.

The early house types of enslaved Africans in the Lowcountry reveal much about the origin of the builders. The concept of the house differs between people of European origin and those of African descent. According to Ferguson, Europeans are more likely to live “inside” their houses given the cold climate while Africans live “around” their houses which were used mostly for sleeping, storage, and shelter.³³ The earliest houses built by enslaved Africans in the Lowcountry were built of clay dug from the surrounding earth. These clay houses are shown to be similar to those along the West African coast, a favored area of slave exporters. The placement of the cabins in locations of the slaves’ choosing also reflected African heritage.

³² Ferguson, Leland, Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992) 18-19.

³³ Ferguson 69.



Figure 2.6
 Plat of Commingtee Plantation, 1786
 Charleston County RMC

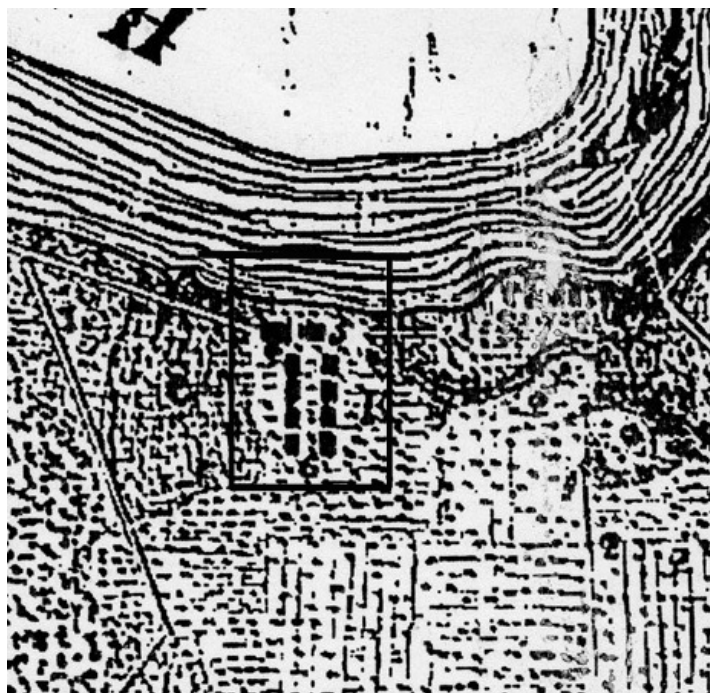


Figure 2.7
Detail of
Comingtee House Settlement



Figure 2.8
Detail of
Stoke Rice Mill Settlement

Social History

Comingtee plantation represents an archetype of plantation society in colonial and antebellum South Carolina. It was part of a vast system of land and people controlled by the Ball family and their descendants. Throughout the plantation history of the Ball family they enslaved more than four thousand Africans and African-Americans.³⁴ Some of the largest plantations owned by the Ball family were Comingtee, Kensington, Middleburg, Quenby, and Limerick.

The system of chattel slavery introduced to the Lowcountry in the late seventeenth century had been in existence since Roman times and more recently most prevalent on the British Caribbean islands. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the British, many of whom later came to Carolina, ran sugar plantations on the island of Barbados with the use of slave labor.

Plantation social history can be described from two points of view, that of the master and that of the slave. These two drastically opposing groups created the social landscape of the plantation. The masters viewed the plantation as a way to gain money and power. Their actions and inactions unknowingly created another culture that was a vital part of the evolution of American social history. While the masters had a choice in how to pursue their social aspirations, the slaves did not. John Michael Vlach writes that “The creation of the slaves’ landscape was a reactive expression, a response to the plans enacted by white landowners.”³⁵

The destruction of the plantation landscape as a result of the defeat of the Confederacy is directly related to the social conflict that still exists between whites

³⁴ Ball, Edward, Slaves in the Family, (New York: Random House, 1998).

³⁴ Vlach 1.

and blacks in today's society. Joseph Himes writes that the first stage in the history of conflict between whites and blacks was the plantation slavery period. He contends that this period was "a minor factor in the social relations of the two groups" because there was no personal competition between whites and blacks.³⁶ This period was followed by the direct conflict that occurred during Reconstruction that placed whites and newly freed blacks in direct competition for jobs, housing, and land. The competition incited the struggle by whites to regain their power over blacks through methods such as segregation, intimidation, and violence.

Colonial Settlement

Comingtee is located on a parcel of land granted to one of the first settlers of Carolina. John Coming was a mate on the ship *Carolina* which was the first to arrive to Carolina in 1670. Also aboard the ship was Affra Harleston, a British woman living in Ireland who gained passage through indentured servitude. The two married by 1672 and in 1678 were granted 740 acres "as high up Cooper River as the point of division into the Eastern and Western branches the tract granted is described as 'at the Tee in the Cooper River'".³⁷ There they erected a wooden house and one of the first plantations in Carolina was established.

In 1672 the Comings were also granted 133 acres of land on the peninsula that would become Charlestowne. According to historian Edward McCrady, John and Affra Coming "appeared before the Grand Council and voluntarily surrendered half of their lands upon Oyster Point, to be employed in and toward the outlaying of

³⁶ Himes, Joseph S. Jr, "The Natural History of Social Conflict in White-Negro Relations," *Phylon*, 10 (1949): 50.

³⁷ Smith, H.A.M, The historical writings of Henry A.M. Smith: articles from the South Carolina historical (and genealogical) magazine, vol.2 Rivers and Regions, (The Reprint Co.: Spartanburg, 1988) 27.

a town”.³⁸ Following the death of her husband, Affra Harleston Coming donated additional land that would become the glebe lands or land belonging to St. Philip’s church. Today this land is known as Harleston Village and is the site of the College of Charleston.

³⁸ McCrady, Edward, The History of South Carolina Under Proprietary Government, 1670-1719, (New York: Macmillan, 1901) 163.

CHAPTER THREE

CASE STUDIES: RECONSTRUCTION VS. CONSERVATION

Preservationists weigh many variables when deciding how to interpret an historic site. Usually, existing conditions, available evidence, and budget dictate the solution to reconstruct or conserve, but speculation is often inevitable particularly when reliable evidence is unavailable. This chapter compares five interpretive approaches in an effort to determine the best approach for Comingtee.

Colonial Williamsburg

Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation began in the 1920s when John D. Rockefeller agreed to fund the project. The mission of Colonial Williamsburg is "to help the future learn from the past" and thorough reconstruction was the chosen method.³⁹ It has been one of the most ambitious reconstruction projects ever attempted.

From the onset, archaeological research was incorporated in the interpretive plan to ensure that the reconstruction was as complete as possible. The early archaeology was entirely focused on the recovery of building foundations and architectural details.⁴⁰ While this is excellent research for building reconstruction, it does not take into account the cultural landscape in its entirety. Beginning in the 1950s Noel Hume, the director of Archaeology collected and documented all found artifacts, not just those with architectural significance. He also introduced the

³⁹ Colonial Williamsburg, <http://www.history.org/foundation/mission.cfm>.

⁴⁰ Poole, Meredith, "A Short History of Archaeology at Colonial Williamsburg," [Colonial Williamsburg.com](http://research.history.org/Archaeological_Research/Features/History.cfm), 2006 <http://research.history.org/Archaeological_Research/Features/History.cfm>.

process of stratigraphic excavation in order to determine dates by identifying artifacts in specific soil layers. Hume's new approach to the archaeology at Colonial Williamsburg was the beginning of a new way of interpreting historic sites.

According to Poole "the most fundamental shift since 1982 (the year Hume retired) is defined by a more anthropological, or comparative approach."⁴¹ Since then the research has been focused on the entire landscape of the colonial town encompassing the life of the governor as well as that of the enslaved Africans and everyone in-between. Although there is much more work to be done, the interpretation of Colonial Williamsburg is more comprehensive than ever.

Despite extensive research and archaeology Colonial Williamsburg is not a perfect reconstruction. Ideally a reconstruction would require a full documentary history with everything from the floor plan to the exact size of the nails, but this is rarely possible. The underlying theme at Williamsburg, according to Brown and Chappell, is that the lack of "physical evidence upon which to base these reconstructions can be outweighed by the need to include them to tell a more broadly truthful story."⁴² Colonial Williamsburg, despite its imperfections has been at the center of preservation for over fifty years and remains the academic standard for many of this country's preservation projects.

Menokin

Menokin is a ruin located in Richland County, Virginia. The house is an eighteenth century stone structure and about one fourth of it remains standing

⁴¹ Poole.

⁴² Brown, Marley R. III and Edward A. Chappell, "Archaeological Authenticity and Reconstruction at Colonial Williamsburg," The Reconstructed Past: Reconstructions in the Public Interpretation of Archaeology and History, Ed. John H. Jameson Jr., (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2004) 52.

(Figure 3.1). Much of the original fabric has been rescued from the ruin and is in storage on the property in the hopes that it will someday be reintroduced into the house though not necessarily through a total reconstruction.

The mission of Menokin Foundation, a private non-profit group, is “to protect the ruins from further deterioration and to present the house in a manner that will inspire the public to learn more about Francis Lightfoot Lee’s contribution to the founding of the United States, and the remarkable talents of the craftsman who constructed his home.”⁴³ The Menokin Foundation philosophy is different because the ruin is used as a teaching tool for preservation students and the public. Foundation members believe that the opportunity for learning is just as important as conserving the building. Even though the building is the focal point of the mission, ongoing research also includes environmental conservation, slavery, and Native Americans.

Innovative ideas for preservation solutions are being introduced at Menokin. As a method of interpreting the structure after the conservation is complete, the Foundation is proposing a “glass house” model that reintroduces the wall massing in glass form (Figure 3.2). The idea is that the glass will function as a skeleton that will be suitable for the reintroduction of original fabric. This method allows the interior to be “put back” while leaving the exterior to the visitors’ imagination. By using this method the context for the interiors will still have some validity without requiring a complete reconstruction that may be partially speculative.

⁴³ Menokin Foundation, <<http://www.menokin.org>>.



Figure 3.1
Menokin, 2005
Photo, www.menokin.org



Figure 3.2
Menokin, 2005
Photo, www.menokin.org

Rosewell

Rosewell is the ruin of an eighteenth century masonry house located in Gloucester County, Virginia. The structure was gutted by fire in the twentieth century and unlike Menokin, not much original fabric survives (Figure 3.3). Only the brick walls remain, so the mission of the private, non-profit Rosewell Foundation is to conserve and interpret them just as they are, as a ruin. Their mission also includes extensive archaeological study.

The Rosewell philosophy is dictated by the amount of information available. In this case there is very little information about what the house looked like before the fire. According to Hilarie Hicks, Executive Director of Rosewell Foundation, if the building were to be reconstructed it would be “a 90% twenty-first century guesstimate of what the building might have looked like in the eighteenth century.”⁴⁴ Indeed this is the very reason that many historic sites are not reconstructed.

There are other reasons why historic ruins are not reconstructed. Hicks also states that the site would lose its most informative feature through a reconstruction by covering the brick, an important research subject on its own and the only original fabric that remains. By spending time with the visitors to Rosewell, Hicks has also found that the ruin is accepted as a different sort of experience than that of the typical house museum. “Visitors often describe their experience at Rosewell in nearly spiritual terms” noting that there is “something powerful about being in the presence of something that has made the trip through time.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Hicks, Hilarie, Personal Communication, June, 2006.

⁴⁵ Hicks 2006.



Figure 3.3
Rosewell Mansion
Photo by HABS located at
<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query>



Figure 3.4
Barboursville Ruin
<http://www.the1804inn.com/html>

Barboursville

The house at Barboursville, north of Charlottesville, Virginia was designed by Thomas Jefferson for James Barbour, former governor of Virginia, and constructed around 1817. It was destroyed by fire in 1884 and has stood as a ruin ever since (Figure 3.4). There is also an eighteenth century brick servant's cottage on the property that survives and predates the house.

It is frequently necessary that owners of historic sites adapt to meet the needs of the modern heritage consumer. New buildings are constructed to house facilities such as restaurants, hotels and gift shops. At times the new buildings are complimentary to the site and sometimes they compete with the historic fabric. Consequently an alternative interpretation, in which the historic fabric itself is not interpreted, is often the most economically viable choice. While many historic sites are important they will not draw visitors without some additional source of entertainment, especially if they are not conveniently located near population centers. In such cases sites create incentives to draw consumers.

The focal point of Barboursville is the winery that has been on the property since 1976. Even though Thomas Jefferson never lived at Barboursville, the marketing inspiration behind the winery is connected to Jefferson's love of wine and his own experimentation with grape cultivation at Monticello.⁴⁶ There is a four-star restaurant and luxury accommodations in addition to the winery. The Barboursville ruin is not interpreted in the same way illustrated by the previous examples. While the architecture has a significant provenance, the house ruin itself is essentially a backdrop for the other activities that take place on the site. The owners were able to

⁴⁶ Barboursville Vineyards, <<http://www.the1804inn.com/inn.html>>.

tap into the Jeffersonian heritage area and create their own niche. The romantic notion that Thomas Jefferson was once a part of the scenery blends well with the idealistic ambiance of the entire site.

Charles Towne Landing State Historic Site

Charles Towne Landing is located in the city of Charleston just west of the Ashley River. It began in 1670 as the first permanent settlement in Carolina before the town was moved onto the Charleston peninsula in 1680. The main theme of the site is archaeology and that theme filters through all aspects of the interpretation. The size of the park is 665 acres and two trails wind through it: the history trail and the animal forest. The history trail offers an audio tour that allows guests to walk the 1.5 mile trail at their leisure. The animal forest provides a glimpse of animals that are native to South Carolina in their preferred habitats.

The history trail offers the visitor a chance to see an archaeological excavation. There are several digs ongoing and visitors are welcome to get involved and ask questions. Much of the above ground interpretation such as the original fortification was discovered through archaeology and has been recreated. Another structure that has been recreated is an indentured servants quarters; it has been constructed using traditional timber framing methods without the help of power tools lending an authentic quality to the building.

Conclusion

These five examples illustrate that each historic site individually selects the most appropriate treatment. Four out of five of the sites have chosen to make archaeology a focus of their investigations and their interpretations. Some have chosen to reconstruct and some have chosen to purely conserve, but none of the interpretations can be labeled as right or wrong.

Charles Towne Landing, as a case study, is the only site in the area that has a similar mission to the proposal for Comingtee. However, while the methodology may be comparable, interpretation of a site through active archaeology, the focus of the archaeology will be different. The work being done at Charlestowne Landing provides a look into the patterns of the first colonial settlement of the area while the study of the Cooper River Region will provide insight into the cultural landscape of rice production and the system of slavery that sustained it.

CHAPTER FOUR

TOURISM, INTERPERTATION, AND MANAGEMENT

This chapter will explore the themes of cultural tourism and cultural heritage management as means of interpreting and managing Cominglee Plantation and the Cooper River National Historic District. The feasibility of an archaeological center on the plantation along with the management philosophy for the cultural artifacts will be introduced.

Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism, also called heritage tourism, is a type of tourism where culture “forms the basis of either attracting tourists or motivating people to travel.”⁴⁷ It is a type of travel that is motivated by a learning component as well as relaxation and enjoyment. Cultural tourists tend to seek out places they have never been in order to become educated about another culture, heritage or environment.

While cultural tourism is not a new phenomenon it is more accessible than ever before. For example, in eighteenth century America travel was typically pursued by wealthy young gentlemen or couples during a “Grand Tour”. “It was largely confined to a small though influential class,” notes J.B. Jackson, and it included mostly “men of property and social standing, not much given to looking beneath the surface of things or to doubting the evidence of their senses”.⁴⁸ Modern travelers

⁴⁷ McKercher, Bob, and Hilary Du Cros, Cultural Tourism: the partnership between tourism and cultural heritage management, (New York: Haworth Hospitality Press, 2002) 4.

⁴⁸ Jackson, John B, The Necessity for Ruins, and Other Topics, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980) 6.

are no longer restricted by wealth and status and people of all economic and educational backgrounds pursue heritage tourism activities.

Each individual wants something different from a historic site. Catherine Cameron and John Gatewood conducted a study to determine visitor motivations. In terms of practical considerations they found the following were most important to visitors: authenticity, good tours/guides/signage, physical access, restaurants, clean restrooms, air conditioning, and parking. Topping the list was the degree of authenticity. People generally wanted to feel that they were a part of the experience, like they were transported to the past, and authentic work/craft displays and period dress helped to achieve that feeling.⁴⁹

People also visit sites for reasons other than a simple thirst for knowledge. As mentioned in chapter three, Hilarie Hicks of Rosewell Foundation in Gloucester, Virginia shared her experience that tourists often relate feelings of spirituality after visiting the Rosewell ruin. Cameron and Gatewood call this spiritual motivation to visit historic sites “numen,” a term used “to describe a transcendental experience that people can have in contact with a historic site” and “sites and displays that conjure in visitors a visceral or emotional response to an earlier event or time.”⁵⁰

Many cultural heritage sites rely on tourism as a major source of funding, but tourism alone rarely provides enough income to sustain historic properties. Most historic sites are funded through generous individuals and through grants that can be local, state, federal or private. Grants are usually only eligible to charitable organizations with 501(c)3 tax-exempt status and many heritage sites are owned by

⁴⁹ Cameron, Catherine M. and John B. Gatewood, “Excursions into the Un-Remembered Past: What People Want from Visits to Historical Sites,” *The Public Historian* 22 (2000): 110.

⁵⁰ Cameron and Gatewood 110.

such groups. It is often difficult for non-profits to acquire enough money to achieve every goal so many sites are not interpreted ideally. The ability to implement an authentic interpretive plan that achieves a balance between the need for funding and the need for authenticity is difficult. This is what is referred to as the “preservation dilemma”. Compromising the site for the benefit of cash flow sometimes achieves the opposite affect as was originally intended. As a result the historic resource becomes the backdrop to the income producing feature of the site. Unfortunately this is often the only way to save historic fabric from destruction.

Cultural Tourism in the South Carolina Lowcountry

Cultural tourism is the largest industry in the Lowcountry region and there are opportunities for growth as new sites are restored and interpreted. According to city statistics, Charleston, South Carolina is one of the top travel destinations in the nation, rivaling New York, Los Angeles, Miami, and Washington D.C with over 4 million visitors each year.⁵¹ Many visitors traveling to Charleston are heritage tourists seeking to experience the culture of a largely intact eighteenth century city and when they arrive they are greeted with world class dining and accommodations. Charleston is the center of the larger Lowcountry region that draws additional tourists to its plantations and gardens peppered along the Ashley, Cooper, and Santee rivers to the south and the Waccamaw River to the north.

In addition to being a heritage tourism destination, Charleston is also a growing living city, which presents another preservation dilemma. It is becoming increasingly difficult to manage preservation and growth as a single entity. As the

⁵¹ <http://www.prt.state.sc.us/files/research/oosleisure.pdf>

demand for more living space and office space increases it will become more difficult to maintain a downtown center that is limited in its ability to grow.⁵² The desire to keep downtown Charleston “authentic” hinders growth but at the same time it allows the city’s largest industry, tourism, to thrive. At the same time the decision by city and county officials to allow the seat of government to remain downtown was instrumental in maintaining Charleston as a “living city.”

Berkeley County and the Cooper River National Historic District

The Cooper River region lies within Berkeley County, formerly St. John’s Berkeley Parish (Figure 4.1). In 2003 over thirty thousand acres of the region were placed on the National Register of Historic Places as a Historic District. There are many aspects of the region which are significant to colonial American history, the most notable being that it was the location of an historic rice plantation culture which thrust together two different cultures, the white planter and the African slave. Other aspects of significance are the many examples of colonial and nineteenth century architecture, archaeological resources, burial grounds (for both planters and slaves), and the contribution to the social history of America. The Cooper River region is one that has been studied selectively in terms of archaeology as it relates to the plantation landscape. There have been in-depth studies conducted on only a few plantations such as Leland Ferguson’s investigation of Middleburg Plantation and the Section 106-mandated excavation of Limerick Plantation, leaving the archaeological record incomplete.

⁵² The city of Charleston has self-imposed the growth limitations by establishing strict zoning guidelines and placing a considerable amount of power with the Board of Architectural Review. The primary growth limitation, however, is the lack of available land on the peninsula.

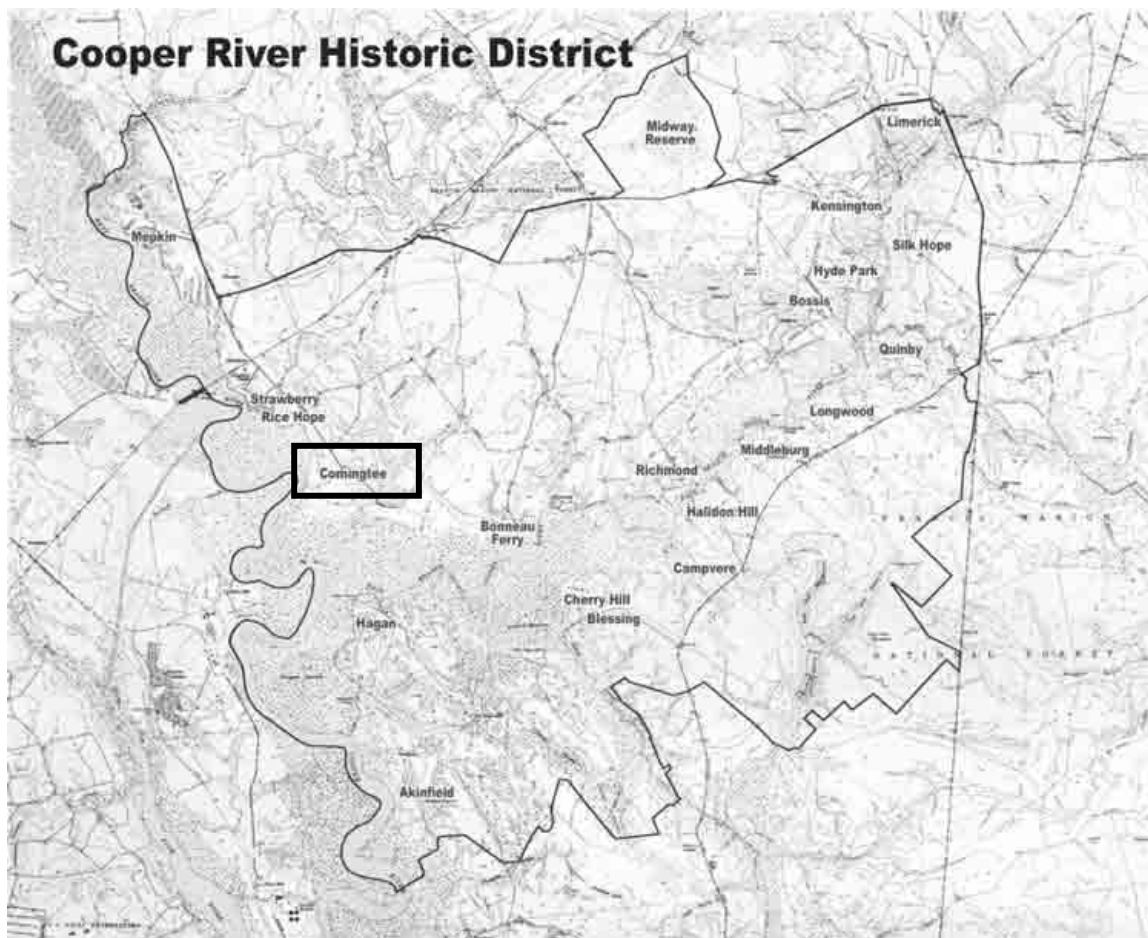


Figure 4.1
Map of Cooper River National Historic District
From National Register Nomination, SCDAH

The excavations that have already taken place highlight the need for further research. It is not a question of whether there is more evidence it is only a question of what that evidence will tell us. Overall, the region “presents the best opportunity for further study of the cultural landscape on a broad scale.”⁵³

Comingtee Plantation Current Conditions

Although Comingtee Plantation is currently open to the public it poses several challenges as a heritage tourism site. These challenges will require creative solutions to attract visitors and inspire them to return to the site. The first challenge is the distance and location of Comingtee in relation to Charleston.⁵⁴ The second challenge is that the site is remote and currently requires navigating unmarked gravel roads. The third challenge is the ruinous condition of the buildings on the site. The fourth is the lack of any services. It is unlikely that the ruins of Comingtee house and rice mill alone will satisfy the heritage tourism needs of the modern consumer. Two similar sites, Rosewell and Menokin were discussed in chapter three. Both of the ruin sites are similarly located in rural areas and each received approximately two thousand five hundred visitors in 2005. Comingtee, if left as a ruin with only minimal accommodations for guests would likely yield the same results, if not less.

⁵³ Martha Zierden, personal communication, March 2, 2007.

⁵⁴ It takes one hour to reach Comingtee from downtown Charleston. A slightly more direct route exists but is currently unavailable for public use. This is much further than the average tourist would drive to experience any given site. The principle of “distance decay” applies here; demand for an attraction diminishes with distance (McKercher and duCros, 33).

Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor

The interpretation and management of Comingtee and the Cooper River district would be enhanced by inclusion in the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. The newly established national heritage area was designated in 2006 and includes the coastal areas of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina (Figure 4.2).⁵⁵ The purpose of the heritage area is to preserve and protect the Gullah/Geechee culture and to “recognize the important contributions made to American culture and history by Africans and African Americans” and it is the only national heritage area that is specific to African American culture.⁵⁶ The commission that will create the master plan and oversee the implementation of programs is in the process of being selected and should be in place by October 1, 2007. In order to create a cohesive heritage area the commission will be charged with integrating local, state, and federal agencies along with non-profit and grass-roots organizations to obtain funding and appropriate it to programs and sites that embody the Gullah/Geechee experience.

Cooper River Tour

There are several sites along the western branch of the Cooper River that could be part of a driving tour of the area that would originate at Comingtee Plantation (Figure 4.3). The idea is that the collection of sites will give a better comprehensive view of the plantation culture by involving visitors in the entire experience from plantation life to transportation to places of worship. Ideally the

⁵⁵ The map shows that the area will reach 30 miles inland from the coast and will include the Cooper River National Register District.

⁵⁶ National Park Service, “Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study and Final Environmental Impact Statement, Atlanta, GA: NPS Southeast Regional Office, 2005.

sites would also be accessible for archaeological excavations done by the proposed Comingtee Archaeological Center.



Figure 4.2
Map of the Proposed Gullah/Geechee Heritage Corridor
From Gullah/Geechee Special Resource Study
National Park Service



Figure 4.3
 Map of Charleston and Cooper River
 The red line depicts the route from Charleston to
 Cominglee Plantation and the Tour Stops

After leaving Comingtee Plantation visitors will travel Rice Hope Road, an eighteenth century route that connected Comingtee with Rice Hope Plantation and sites beyond. Rice Hope Plantation is the next location on the tour. Originally the property of the Harleston family in the eighteenth century, Rice Hope was acquired by Dr. William Read, a surgeon of the Continental Army during the Revolution. The Read family retained ownership until 1875. In 1924 the property was acquired by Senator Joseph Frelinghuysen from New Jersey who also purchased Comingtee, Fish Pond, and Strawberry Plantations to use for hunting and entertaining. Currently the colonial revival house that was built by Senator Frelinghuysen is open as a bed and breakfast.⁵⁷

Strawberry Chapel, the next stop, was built in 1725. Strawberry Chapel was constructed to serve as the chapel of ease for the Biggin Parish Church. It was part of the Colonial town of Childsbury, the next stop on the tour. Strawberry Chapel is the only extant structure from the town of Childsbury, but archaeological evidence already uncovered would be greatly enhanced by further study.⁵⁸ It may be possible in the future to re-create some aspects of the town based on the excavations using ghost structures to show the placement, and possibly the construction type, of buildings.

Taveau Church is a wood frame structure that was constructed in 1835 for Martha Caroline Swinton Taveau, former wife of John Ball and mistress of Kensington Plantation. The church was constructed on the former Clermont Plantation. In the 1930s Clermont Plantation became part of the larger Mepkin

⁵⁷ Chandler, Andrew, Mary Edmonds, Valerie Marcil, J.Tracy Power, Stephen Skelton, Katherine Saunders, Jonathan Poston, Carl Steen, and Ellen Shlasko, National Register Nomination for Cooper River District, 2002.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Plantation and the owners of Mepkin, the Luce family, donated the church to the Taveau Methodist Church congregation, an African American congregation that had been using the church since the death of Mrs. Taveau in 1847.

The final stop on the tour is approximately 3 miles from Comingtee and it is Mepkin Abbey, formerly Mepkin Plantation. Mepkin Plantation was purchased by Henry Laurens in 1762. Henry Laurens was a prominent Charlestonian and served as president of the Continental Congress. Before the Revolution he was one of the wealthiest men in America holding title to thousands of acres of property including the seven thousand acre Mepkin Plantation. The plantation house no longer survives but the Laurens graveyard remains as does a graveyard for the Luce Family, twentieth- century owners of the property who donated it to the Trappist monks in the 1960s. There are several buildings that remain from the Luce period including some designed by noted architect Edward Durell Stone and a garden by noted Charleston landscape architect Loutrell Briggs.

The Northern Invasion

In the 1920s and 1930s, many Lowcountry plantations were purchased by northerners who were looking for country houses with enough land to hunt. Senator Joseph Frelinghuysen from New Jersey purchased Comingtee and Rice Hope Plantations and the Henry Luce family purchased Mepkin Plantation.⁵⁹ Many of the plantations have been passed down to later generations and the lands are still intact.

⁵⁹ For a complete list of plantations purchased by northern immigrants see: Chandler, Andrew, Mary Edmonds, Valerie Marcil, J.Tracy Power, Stephen Skelton, Katherine Saunders, Jonathan Poston, Carl Steen, and Ellen Shlasko, *National Register Nomination for Cooper River District*, 2002.

As a result of the “Yankee Invasion” numerous plantations, including the houses and the land, have been saved from development.

Cultural Heritage Management

The resources of the Cooper River National Historic District will merge two ideals as a means for interpreting and marketing the site; cultural tourism and cultural heritage management. Our cultural heritage is composed of ideas and objects that together form our identity as a nation. These ideas and objects are identified as cultural resources and they are defined by the National Park Service as:

An aspect of a cultural system that is valued by or significantly representative of a culture or that contains significant information about a culture. A cultural resource may be a tangible entity or a cultural practice. Tangible cultural resources are categorized as districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects for the National Register of Historic Places and as archeological resources, cultural landscapes, structures, museum objects, and ethnographic resources for NPS management purposes (NPS-28, Appendix A).

The practice of maintaining and interpreting our cultural resources is called cultural heritage management. The definition of cultural heritage management has been variable through time as experts add to the realm of cultural resources. The National Park Service currently defines cultural heritage management as follows:

The range of activities aimed at understanding, preserving, and providing for the enjoyment of cultural resources. It includes research related to cultural resources, planning for actions affecting them, and stewardship of them in the context of overall park operations. It also includes support for the appreciation and perpetuation of related cultural practices, as appropriate (NPS-28, Appendix A).

Cultural resource management is conducted by many different individuals and groups both private and public. Examples of managed sites include large cultural

resources like Chaco Canyon, New Mexico and Colonial Williamsburg or more contained sites such as the battlefield at Gettysburg or George Washington's Mt. Vernon. Cultural resources can also be intangible features such as the folklore or storytelling traditions of a particular culture.

The main goal of cultural heritage management is "to conserve a representative sample of our tangible and intangible heritage for future generations."⁶⁰ Often, but not always this goal includes providing public access. While it is important that the resources are shared the high traffic and environmental conditions can be harmful to artifacts. It is essential to realize that while tourism and cultural heritage management frequently go hand in hand, tourism is not the only consideration where cultural artifacts are concerned. For this reason it has been difficult for cultural heritage managers and cultural tourism managers to collaborate successfully.

The NPS recognizes five categories of resources: districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects (NPS-28, 1.B.1). The management of heritage resources is multi-faceted and includes handling many types of artifacts. Each of these resources requires specialized treatment by individuals with specific skills. With proper planning and research, these resources can be interpreted and cared for indefinitely.

⁶⁰ McKercher and duCros 44.

CHAPTER FIVE PROPOSED COOPER RIVER DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL CENTER

During the summer of 2006 I worked with Historic Charleston Foundation to document the structures and researched the plantation site to provide an assessment of the conditions. This thesis is a continuation of that work and explores a theoretical “next step” that would preserve the site. This proposed new center for archaeological studies to be constructed on the site for the investigation and interpretation of artifacts extracted from the Cooper River National Historic District would provide a viable use for the site and a central archaeological study center for the region.

The mission of the Comingtee Archaeological Center will be to research, historically and archeologically, the culture of Cooper River plantations in order to present in-depth interpretation of the plantation as a cultural landscape. The center will uncover archaeological resources and interpret them with an emphasis on the African American experience.

The non-profit center would be dependant on donors and grant assistance to obtain funding.⁶¹ Tuition-based field schools conducted by center staff could provide additional income by utilizing students seeking training in archaeological investigation and interpretation. In addition, the newly established Gullah/Geechee National Heritage Area designation could play a large role in raising funds locally and providing an audience.

⁶¹ This thesis does not attempt to provide the substantial cost analysis that is necessary to fund the project.

The idea for the archaeological center came after researching and realizing two things: the African American experience as it relates to plantation sites is still underrepresented; and a remote site with buildings in ruins will likely not attract enough visitors to sustain even simple maintenance. The site is not traditional in the museum sense and will require a non-traditional interpretation. With that in mind I wanted to encourage a use that would benefit the public while encouraging study in a growing field.

While the main archaeological center building could be an anchor for the site, additional buildings would be necessary to make the site a complete experience as well as fully functioning for visitors and staff. This will require that more than one building be erected on the site, within close proximity to the main building, to house office, storage, and laboratory space for the archaeologists and support staff and complete visitor amenities including a restaurant. It is intended that the building design for this thesis serve as a model for the design of the other structures. It is also recommended that the buildings be constructed in phases as demand increases and funds become available.

Design Methodology

New buildings erected on historic sites are controversial, particularly where historic resources are in close proximity. The question arises whether to build a modern structure, to integrate a vernacular style or to combine the two to create an updated vernacular. The path I have chosen for this site and for this building is the latter. I was inspired by the commanding frame of plantation houses like Belvidere, Middleburg, The Rocks and, of course, Comingtee. Although many of the details are

English in origin, their forms are still used today. It was important that the building appear new but speak to the architecture of the plantation south.

I am proposing that the archaeological center be positioned on a high point on the site, near Comingtee house, pending archaeological excavation (Figure 5.1).⁶² Although it has not been uncovered, it is possible that the original house of John and Affra Coming may have been situated on the same high land and it is important that any new structures are clear of the historical areas. Finding the location of the house and possible seventeenth century artifacts would be key to interpreting the complete colonial history of the site.

Whereas planters in the south used their great wealth to build prominent structures, I have chosen to design a building that will blend with the landscape in both form and materials. The form is an attempt to create a design with an emphasis on horizontal lines using height only to accent the central gallery axis. The use of large windows and clerestory treatment around the central gallery is intended to create a feeling of the outdoors inside.

The building is timber frame and sheathed with natural stained wood weather boards. For accents, shingles will be applied to create texture and interest. The copper roof is a continuation of the selection of natural materials and provides a smooth texture to contrast with the surrounding vegetation. Trim work such as that on windows and doors will be made of mahogany to blend with the surroundings and to provide a compliment to the copper roof which would patina over time. The window openings are a mixture of traditional materials and modern shapes.

⁶² FEMA Regulations require that the building be built on high land or on a raised foundation.



Figure 5.1
Comingtee Plantation Site Plan
Illustrating Proposed Archaeological Center

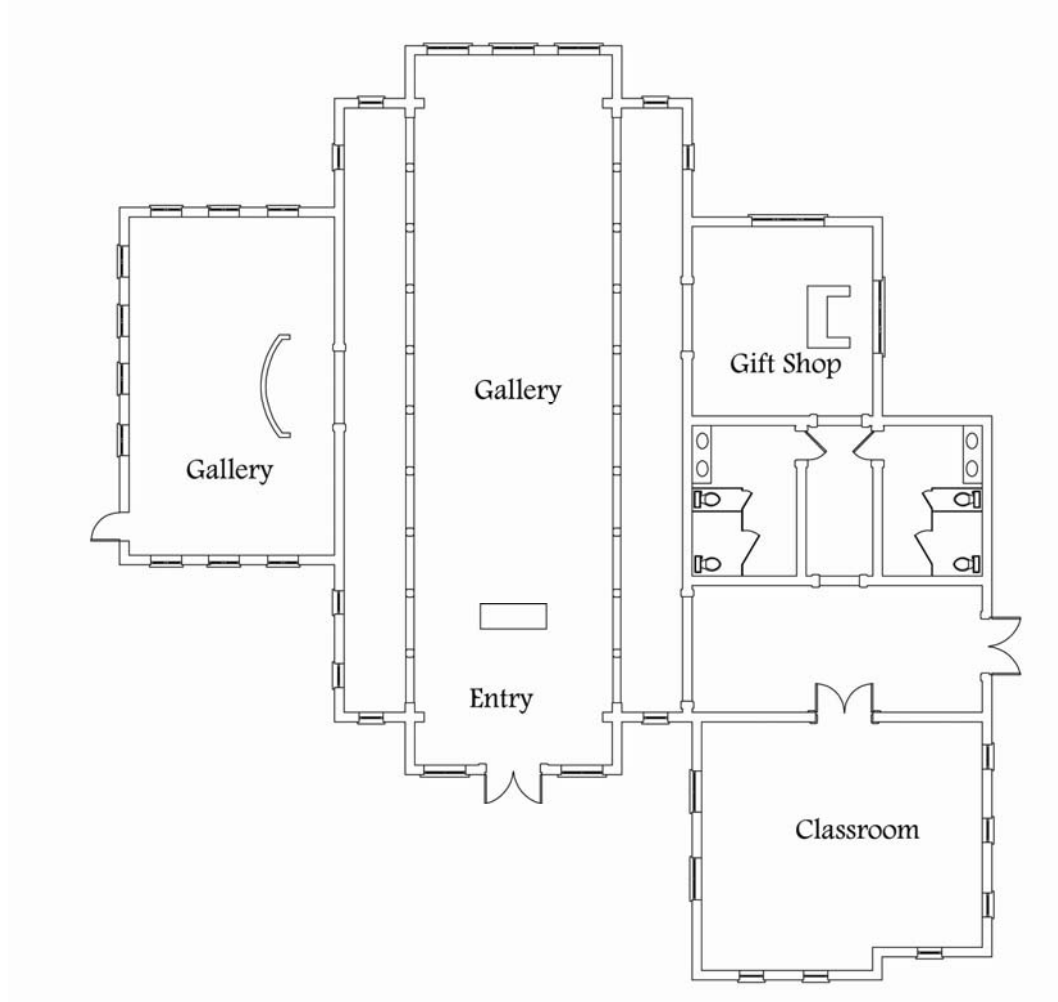


Figure 5.2
Cooper River Archaeological Center
Proposed Floor Plan



Figure 5.3
Cooper River Archaeological Center
Proposed Elevations



Figure 5.4
Cooper River Archaeological Center
Proposed Elevations

CHAPTER SIX

STOKE RICE MILL CONSERVATION PLAN

Introduction and Methodology

Stoke Rice Mill has been standing on the west branch of the Cooper River for over one hundred seventy years. Unfortunately it is severely deteriorated and currently exists as a ruin. The goal of this section was to determine methods of stabilizing the ruin so that it can be maintained as a cultural heritage resource as a part of the Cooper River interpretive center. The rice mill has been chosen for the conservation study because it is the best candidate for repairs. The process of conserving the mill building included the assessment and documentation of current conditions. This section discusses the conservation issues concerning the rice mill and will focus on the following aspects of deterioration: bricks and mortar, intrusive vegetation, timber failure, and water intrusion.

The methods used to provide solutions are threefold: First, a literary review was conducted to establish current methods of conserving brick structures. Second, mortar testing was conducted to determine the proper materials for repairs. Third, professionals in the field were contacted to give examples of how they have addressed similar situations.

Current Conditions and Conservation Issues

The rice mill at Comingtee is on the portion of the property referred to as “Stoke”. While Comingtee encompasses land on both the east and west branch of the Cooper River, Stoke Mill is located directly on the west branch. The mill is in

ruins, but a photograph reveals that it was previously three and a half stories tall. The one and one half stories were constructed of masonry and remain standing (Figure 6.1). The upper two and one half stories were constructed of wood and have disappeared. It is not known whether the structure was originally built with the frame portion, but it is likely that it was.

Overall the mill seems to be structurally sound and would benefit from repairs and maintenance. The brick appears to be in good condition, but the mortar is failing in many places. There are 3' to 9' holes in the walls where openings were located that will continue to expand if not repaired. There are vines, bushes, and small trees growing on the remaining walls and the vegetation fully occupies the interior of the mill.

When the mill was built, sometime before 1833, it was water powered and the location of the missing wheel is evident on the exterior water elevation.⁶³ There are two dressed stones, one is built into the building and the other is on the other side of the race, built into a retaining wall (Figure 6.2). It is likely that stone was used because the area was under a lot of stress and needed a material that would remain stable. According to Richard Porcher, botanist and rice mill researcher, the wheel was an under-shot type which means that the water flowed quickly under the wheel to push it around.⁶⁴ Underneath the wheel the ground was paved in brick, likely done to form an even surface for the flow of water. It is not known at this time exactly how the mill functioned inside.

⁶³ Thomas Finklea to John Ball, November 1, 1833, "This will inform you that I had the gleanings from the Stoke crop put into the mill on 30th Oct...." John Ball papers, 1802-1895. (1134.02.04) South Carolina Historical Society.

⁶⁴ Richard Porcher, personal communication, June 21, 2006.

Inside the building a large brick mount was constructed which indicates a change in the way the mill was powered (Figure. 6.3). The brick mount was used to support a large steam engine. In addition, several pieces of cast iron machinery have been uncovered. These pieces can be compared to other machinery located on nearby plantations such as nearby Middleburg or Mansfield in Georgetown.



Figure 6.1
Photo of Stoke Rice Mill
Photo courtesy of Chris Judge,
South Carolina Heritage Trust
Date Unknown

The mill building offers several clues to its date of construction although a specific date cannot be determined at this time. First, the brick color corresponds with early to mid-nineteenth century buildings elsewhere in the area.⁶⁵ Second, the three course common bond construction was not generally used until the 1820s or 1830s.⁶⁶ Earlier buildings used English bond (alternating courses of headers and stretchers) for such work-related outbuildings. Third, references to the rice mill at Stoke in letters from Thomas Finklea, the plantation overseer, to John Ball Jr. indicate that the mill was in operation for the 1833 autumn harvest season.⁶⁷ And while this does not confirm a date of construction, we can be somewhat certain that the mill was built no later than early 1833.



Figure 6.2
Possible part of wheel mechanism
Photo by author

⁶⁵ The brick in the mill corresponds closely to brick used in the city of Charleston in the 18th and 18th century aptly described as Charleston Gray Brick. It is a large size, 4.5" x 9" and has the characteristic iron spots of many other buildings in Charleston.

⁶⁶ Richard Marks, personal communication, July 7, 2006.

⁶⁷ Thomas Finklea to John Ball, November 1, 1833.



Figure 6.3
Steam Engine Mount
Photo by author

Intrusive Vegetation

Stoke Rice Mill has a severe problem with overgrown vegetation, particularly on the interior. The types of vegetative growth can be divided into five groups: herbaceous plants; vines; lichens, mosses, and fungi; shrubs, and trees.⁶⁸ Each of the five categories is represented at Stoke Mill. Vegetation growth on a masonry building signals the presence of a constant source of moisture that can damage both the bricks and the mortar. All types of growth are particularly troublesome in climates that experience freeze/thaw cycles though that is not the case in this region. The removal of vegetation should be done very carefully as it has the potential to cause additional damage.

The herbaceous plant category typically consists of wildflowers, grasses, and weeds (Figure 6.4). While this category of plants is not as destructive as woody plants, they do cause damage by infiltrating mortar joints and defects in the masonry, allowing moisture to enter and become trapped. Excessive water penetration causes mortar failure by weakening the lime binder. Vines can be considerably more destructive than herbaceous plants (Figure 6.4). They essentially create a trap for moisture between their leaves and the building. They also have roots that can penetrate joints, destroying the bond between brick and mortar. Some vines are more destructive than others depending on the diameter and density of the roots. The types of vines on the walls will require further study, but there are certain types which carry an enzyme in their roots that attacks the stability of lime.

⁶⁸ The majority of the following information concerning vegetation is from the following resource: Warnock, Robert, Lila Fendrick, Barbara Hightower, and Terry Tatum, "Vegetative Threats to Historic Sites and Structures", CRM Online Bulletin, Volume 7 No. 2, <http://crm.cr.nps.gov/issue.cfm?volume=7&number=02>



Figure 6.4
Stoke Rice Mill, 2006
Various forms of vegetation found in the mill
Photo by author

Lichens, mosses, and fungi are all present and indicate the presence of a more complicated moisture problem in the historic masonry since a constant moisture source is needed for them to survive (Figure 6.5). While these growths can usually be removed, they are usually a symptom of a larger problem that should be addressed in order to provide a viable solution.

Shrubs are almost as damaging to a historic building as trees. They can have woody, dense roots that can push mortar out of the joints and bricks out of the wall. The growth of shrubs is also an indication that there is excessive organic material present on the building supporting the new vegetative growth.

Trees are as damaging to historic buildings from below grade as from above. Trees may fall during a storm and cause irreparable damage or even destroy an entire structure. When a tree is too close to the building, roots grow underneath the foundation which can cause uneven shifting and structural cracking. Tree limbs that have developed a canopy over a building can drop acidic leaves that lead to mortar deterioration. Trees also drop seeds that can be the beginning of more trees that may take root in the wall system.



Figure 6.5
Stoke Rice Mill, 2006
Rising damp and fungal growth on the exterior
Photo by author



Figure 6.6
Stoke Rice Mill, 2006
Exposed top of wall
Photo by author

Mortar Issues

There are four distinct issues at Stoke Rice Mill that are allowing the mortar to deteriorate. First, the building is without a roof and the top of the wall system is exposed (Figure 6.6). As a result much of the mortar is no longer viable as part of the wall system. In order to prevent any more water damage it is necessary to stop the water from coming in before attempting any repair work such as repointing is considered. Historic masonry specialist Jack Peet has recommended that a mortar wash, a thin overall coating, be applied to the top of the walls followed by a cap of lead coated copper sheet metal installed by a specialist in historic metal seam roofing. For the mortar wash he recommends Virginia Lime Works, NHL 5. To re-point the walls, the friable mortar should be removed to a minimum depth of 1" (or until it is stable) and the joints should be filled with natural hydraulic lime, Virginia Lime Works, NHL 3.5 white mixed with the appropriate aggregate and water.⁶⁹ The aggregate used should match the sample taken from the mill itself in texture and color (see mortar analysis). If possible it should be determined where the sand came from. It is highly likely that the sand was taken out of the Cooper River and a sample should be taken to determine if that was the case.

The second issue is the presence of what appears to be Portland cement mortar in some of the joints. This is an apparent modern repointing attempt. This modern cement mortar should be removed, but that can be difficult if not impossible. The correct tool for the removal is a pneumatic chisel, not a grinding wheel and the procedure should be performed by a skilled mason.⁷⁰ If the brick is

⁶⁹ Jack Peet, Historic Masonry Consultant, Personal Communication, 21 November 2006. Mr. Peet has used a similar method to conserve Rosewell in Gloucester, Virginia.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

damaged in the process of removal it can be patched using Jahn mortar or replaced with a matching old brick. If old bricks are unavailable a new brick made to the specifications of the historic brick may be used.⁷¹

While these are viable methods to improve an historic masonry structure they are not necessarily appropriate for the rice mill. The recommendation is that the mill be stabilized and this will require the insertion of salvaged bricks and new mortar. It will also require removing Portland cement if possible due to its harmful effects on soft bricks.

The third issue is the water saturation of part of the building foundation due to its location directly in the tidal marsh (Figure 6.6). The mortar has been washed away over time and is recessed to a depth of more than 1", sometimes up to 4". This area should be repointed and will require hydraulic lime mortar. The building will never be dry so it is important that there is a maintenance plan in place that provides for periodic repointing, particularly for the damp areas.

The constant rising damp has also resulted in biological growth (Figure 6.6). It will be impossible to keep this portion of the building dry given that it sits in the water so attempting to remove the biologicals would probably be of little use. The bricks that remain submerged will likely remain sound for a long time, however, the absence of a damp-proof course causes problems for the bricks that are absorbing moisture through capillary action and rising damp.⁷²

⁷¹ Warren, John, "Conservation of Brick", (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999), "No reused brick shall be laid in such a manner that it can be thought to have been originally in that position. Where doubt could exist a date on a concealed face will assist future historians." While this is a responsible method for repairing highly significant structures, it is not necessarily the method that should be used for a ruin such as the rice mill.

⁷² Warren Plate 8.1.

Structural Issues

Stoke Rice Mill has been heavily vandalized for decades and many bricks are missing and broken (Figures 6.7 and 6.8). Most of the missing bricks have been taken from window and door openings leaving them structurally unstable. There are three ways that the broken brick problem could be addressed. The first method is to remove the broken piece of brick and a salvaged or newly made brick could be inserted. The newly made brick should match the characteristics of the brick that is to be removed. The second method is to rebuild the brick using mortars formulated to match the properties of the original brick.⁷³ Cathedral Stone makes a product specific to this type of repair. A brick can be repaired even if more than half the material is missing.⁷⁴ The third method is to do nothing and allow the public to see the ruin just as it is as long as it is structurally stable as determined by a structural engineer.

Many of the first period window and door openings have been compromised by second period openings placed in close proximity (Figure 6.9).⁷⁵ If it is determined that all of the openings should remain it may be necessary to install an anchoring system in the weak spots between the openings before repairing the brick and repointing. An example of an anchoring system that could be used is the Cintec system (Figure 6.10).⁷⁶ This system is non-corrosive and is made to specifications. A stainless steel

⁷³ Hall, Loretta, "To Repair or Replace: That is the Question", Traditional Masonry, 1 (2006): 8.

⁷⁴ Hall 9.

⁷⁵ More research needs to be conducted to determine exactly which openings are original and a decision should be made concerning which openings should remain open and which should be closed.

⁷⁶ Cintec brochure, Cintec International Ltd., 2006.



Figure 6.7
Stoke Rice Mill, 2006
Missing bricks that will need replacement
Photo by author



Figure 6.8
Stoke Rice Mill, 2006
Broken bricks that need repair
Photo by author



Figure 6.9
Stoke Rice Mill, 2006
Unstable window alignment
Photo by author

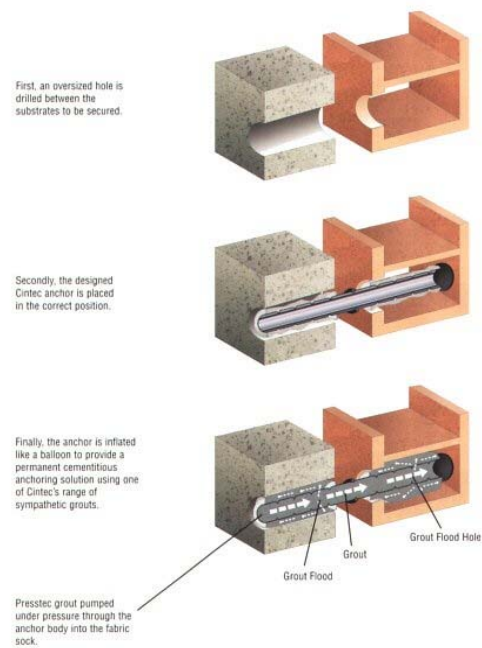


Figure 6.10
Cintec Anchor System

Photo:
<http://www.cintec.com/en/anchor/over02.htm>

rod covered with a fabric sleeve is inserted into the wall. The fabric sleeve is then filled with grout which fills the bore hole and allows a liquid bonding agent to pass through to the surrounding bricks creating a tight seal. This system has been used around the world in projects as large as a bridge and as small as a brick partition wall.

There are also problems with several of the brick segmental arches that could be repaired with an anchoring system. Some of them have separated from the surrounding wall system caused by settlement of the opening below as seen in the front entry of the mill (Figure 6.11). The segmental arch above the door is failing leading to settlement of the window above. This is most likely due to the rotting door header that is continually exposed to the weather.

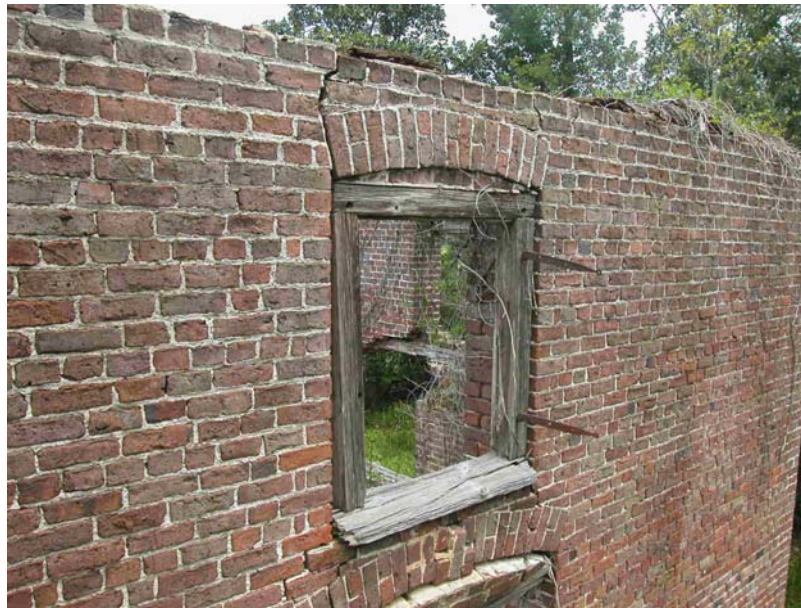


Figure 6.11
Unstable segmental arch
Photo by author

Mortar Analysis

A mortar sample was taken from Stoke Rice Mill and taken to the lab to determine the type of sand that was used. The lime was digested using acid and the remaining sand was analyzed under 45X magnification. The acid pour was highly reactive and bubbled for more than ten minutes.

The particles varied in shape from sub angular to sub round and this suggests that the sand was taken from the river. The size of the particles varied from fines to coarse sand with some larger pieces of shell (the break down is listed in the chart below). Pieces of shell and brick dust were also visible. The overall color of the sand was 10YR 7/2 using the Munsell Color Chart, but the colors varied depending on the material. Under magnification there appeared to be a large amount of quartz crystals (Figure 6.12).

SAMPLE WEIGHT = 59 GRAMS

AMOUNT OF SAMPLE LOST DURING TESTING = .14 GRAMS

AGGREGATE SIZE	WEIGHT	PERCENTAGE OF ORIGINAL SAMPLE
FINES	.08G	.001%
200	1.66G	.03%
100	5.45G	.09%
60	6.38G	.11%
40	33.35G	.57%
20	8.79G	.15%
10	3.15G	.05%
TOTAL	58.86G	100%

Table 6.1
Mortar Analysis Aggregate Data



Figure 6.12
Aggregate remaining after acid digestion
Photo by author

Conclusion: Recommendations for Conservation

It is likely that the mill will not receive any of the treatments described in this paper before it collapses. Although it may be possible to preserve the mill, it may not be practical or even desirable to resolve all of its issues. But now that the conditions have been assessed I propose the following steps be taken to conserve the mill building for the safety of visitors:

- Undertake structural engineering assessment before any maintenance takes place to ensure that the building will not collapse and cause injury.
- Remove all vegetation and continue removal on a bi-monthly maintenance schedule. The schedule for the mill can coincide with the grounds maintenance of the archaeological center.
- Remove damaged bricks and replace with salvaged bricks to re-create the shell of the mill. Remove Portland cement mortar and replace with lime based mortar. Cap walls with mortar wash and top with lead coated copper; re-set window openings where segmental arches have failed.
- Create a yearly maintenance plan that monitors brick mortar and replaces it when necessary, particularly in the damp areas.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

This design of this project was to provide an avenue for the interpretation of Comingtee Plantation. In the process it became clear that Comingtee Plantation cannot be interpreted without including the entire Cooper River region and the most understudied and underrepresented facet of the region is slavery. The unique aspect of this proposal is to interpret the entire region whereas many historic sites interpret only one property, or family. While the Cooper River region was, at times, dominated by the Ball family, there were many other slave-owning families that made significant contributions to the plantation landscape.

In 1998 Edward Ball, descendant of the Ball family of Comingtee Plantation, published a book entitled *Slaves in the Family*. The book attempted to trace the history of several of the families that were enslaved on Ball family plantations on the Cooper River and he was successful in his endeavor. One of the things that made the book so successful was the widespread readership and the affect on so many people. Edward Ball made reading about the history of his family and their slaves enjoyable and intriguing; it started a new conversation about the true story of slavery. For his efforts he won the National Book Award for non-fiction in 1998.

It is likely that the popularity of *Slaves in the Family* would have a positive affect on the tourism possibilities at Comingtee and the Cooper River Region. Such a popular book with solid scholarly research could serve as a basis for an interpretation of Comingtee Plantation and draw visitors from across the country. With such a broad audience there is also the possibility that sponsorship could be

obtained from large companies wishing to be a part of the responsible interpretation of an important part of American history.

As this thesis is being written, a new museum is being proposed for the City of Charleston that would encompass the international slave trade as it affected South Carolina and the history of African Americans to modern times. The mission of the International African-American Museum has not been officially established but according to Dr. Gretta Middleton, museum director, it is to be a display for ideas and artifacts and to provide a place for community interaction. More importantly, however, the board of directors wishes to start a new conversation about the true story of slavery.⁷⁷

While many plantation sites on display today feature spectacular houses with beautifully furnished rooms and sweeping gardens, the Comingtee plantation site is not about those things. The European settlers responsible for the institution of slavery have let their buildings fall and now the land is ready to tell the story of the people who made the system work. The plantation landscape is the “slave landscape” and there are not enough sites dedicated to the accurate historical memory of slavery. This thesis does not attempt to interpret slavery; it is merely an effort to create a forum in which it could be studied further.

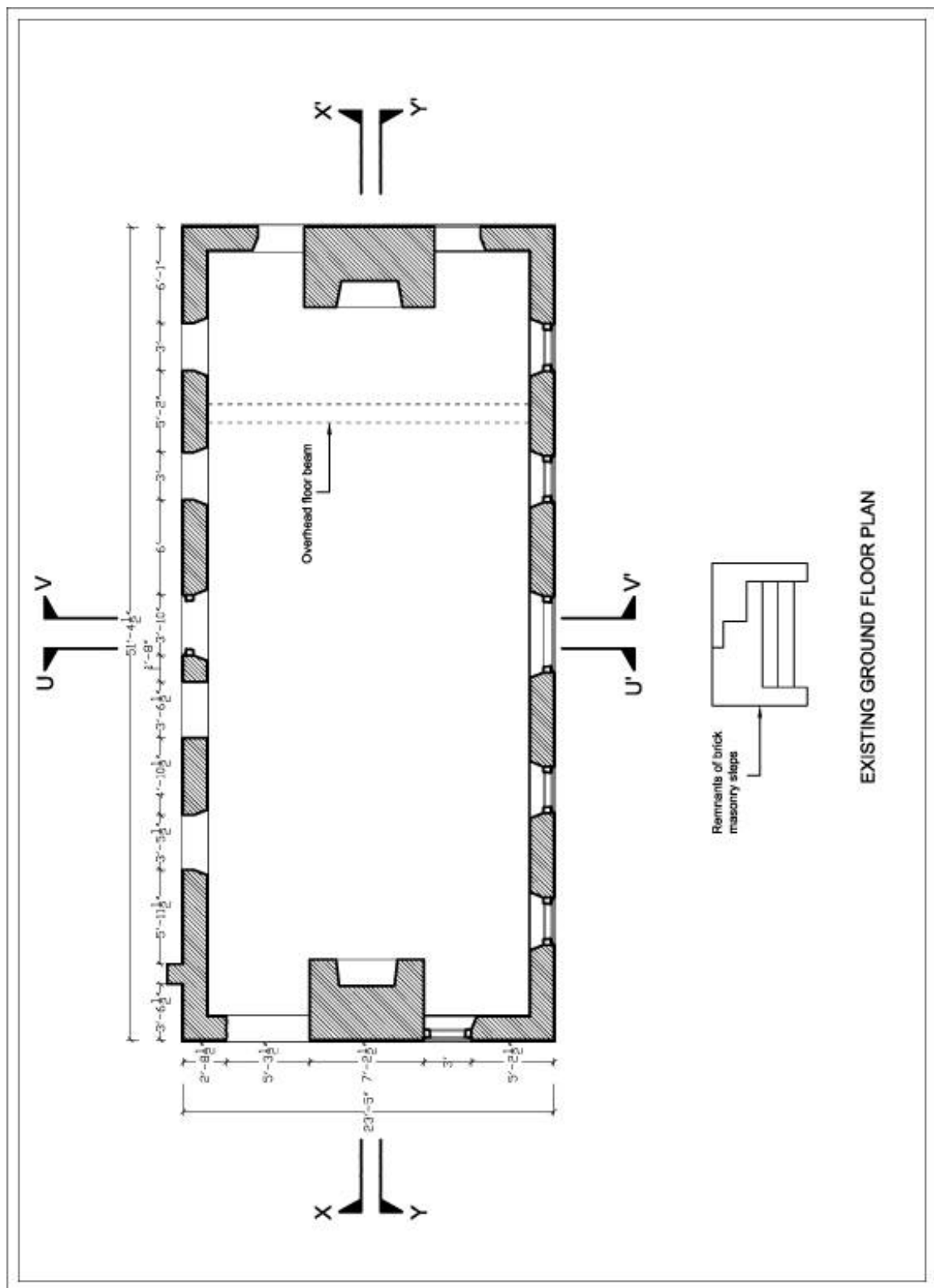
Some might say that the ideal manner for the preservation of Comingtee Plantation would be to rebuild the house and rice mill so that visitors could imagine Elias Ball in his easy chair or witness the force of a steam powered mortar crushing the bran from millions of grains of rice. However, that method of interpretation is neither possible nor preferable in this case. The site as it sits today has the potential

⁷⁷ Dr. Gretta A. Middleton, personal communication, 16 April, 2007.

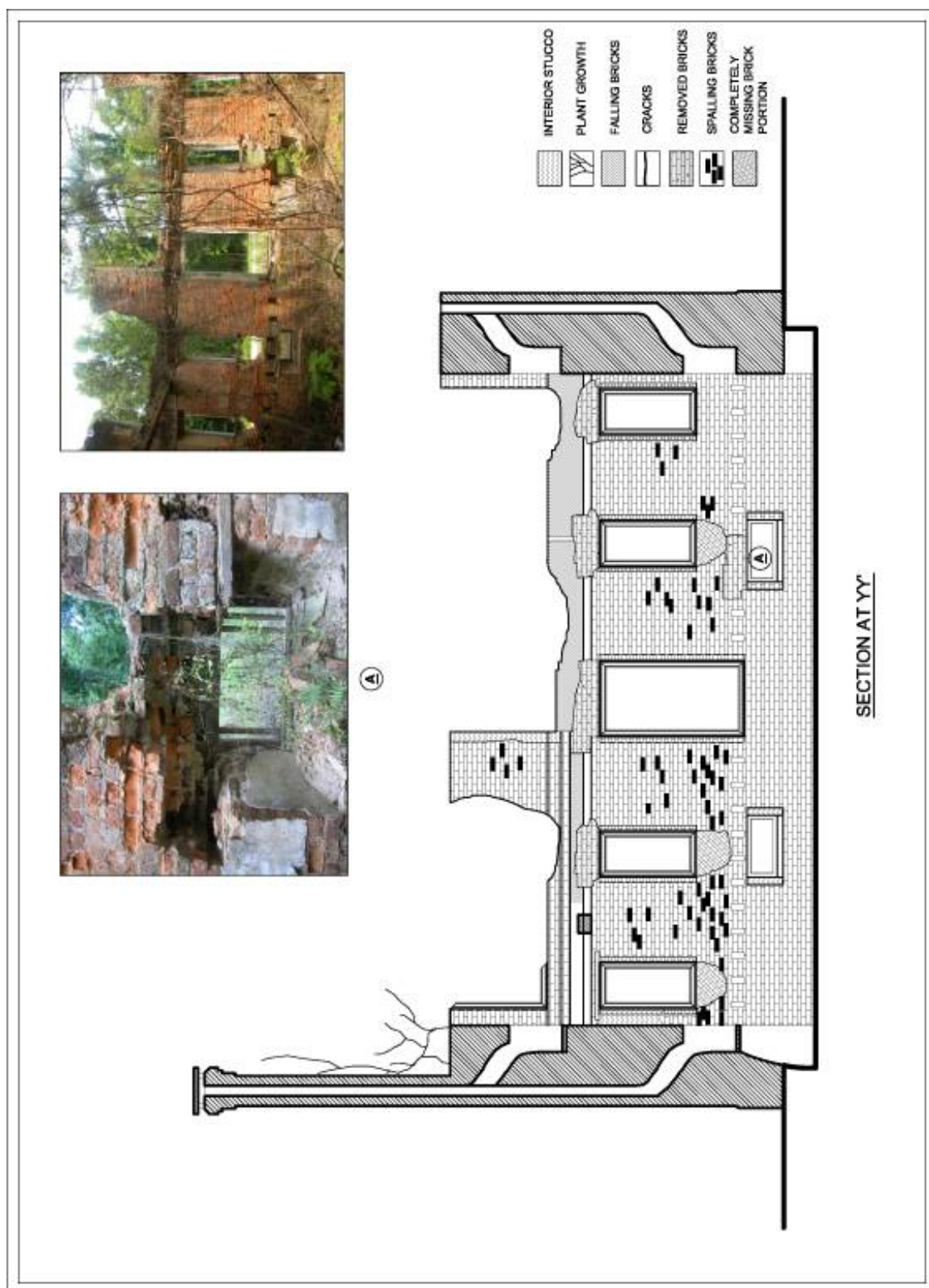
to be more than a pretty museum property, it has the potential to change the way we think about slavery as it relates to our American past. Retaining the ruins is essential because they represent the fall of the rice plantation empire and the beginning of a new chapter in the lives of African-Americans.

APPENDIX

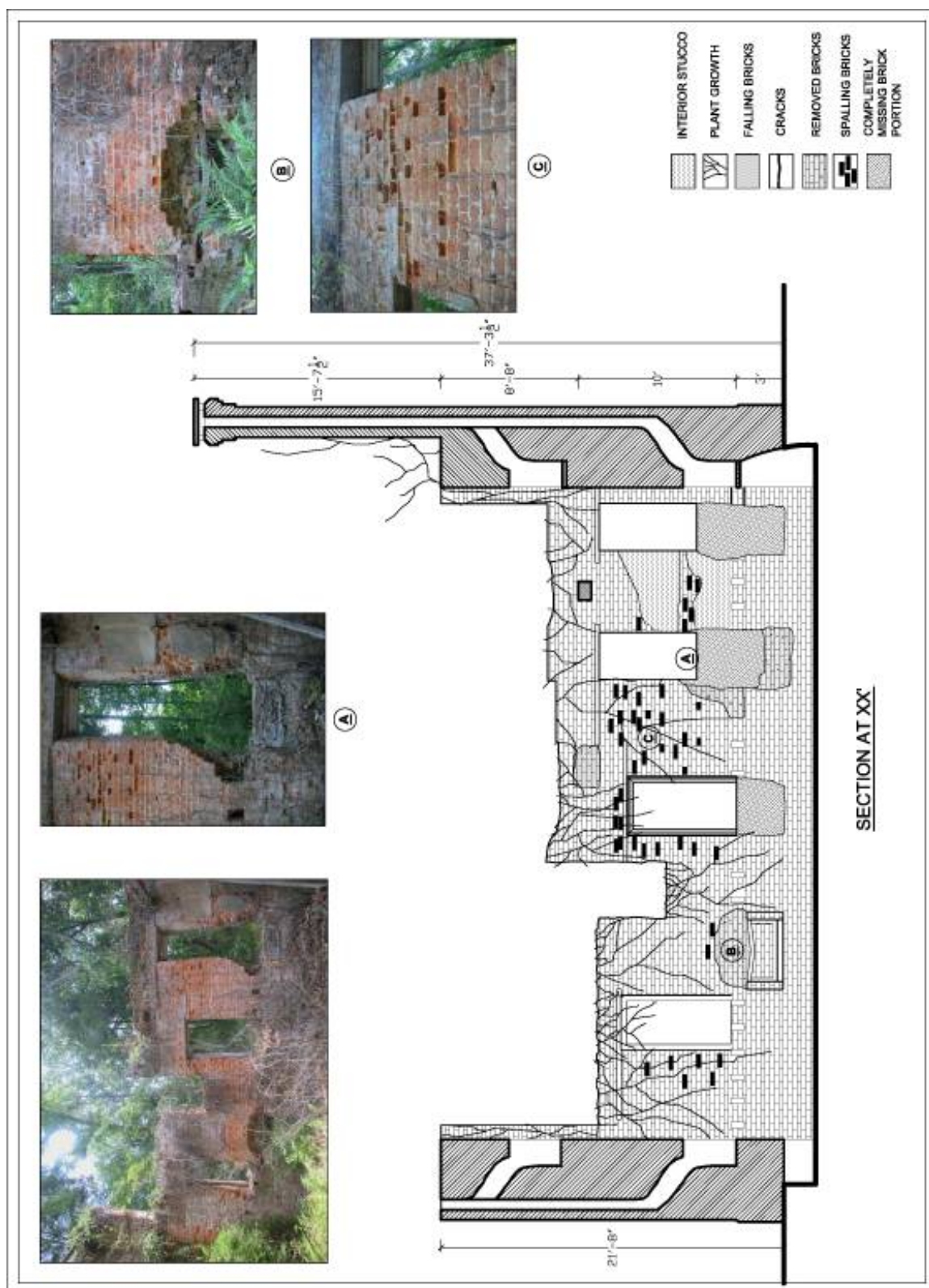
All drawings are by Abbid Khan and are included as a record of the condition of Comingtee House and Rice Mill in 2006.



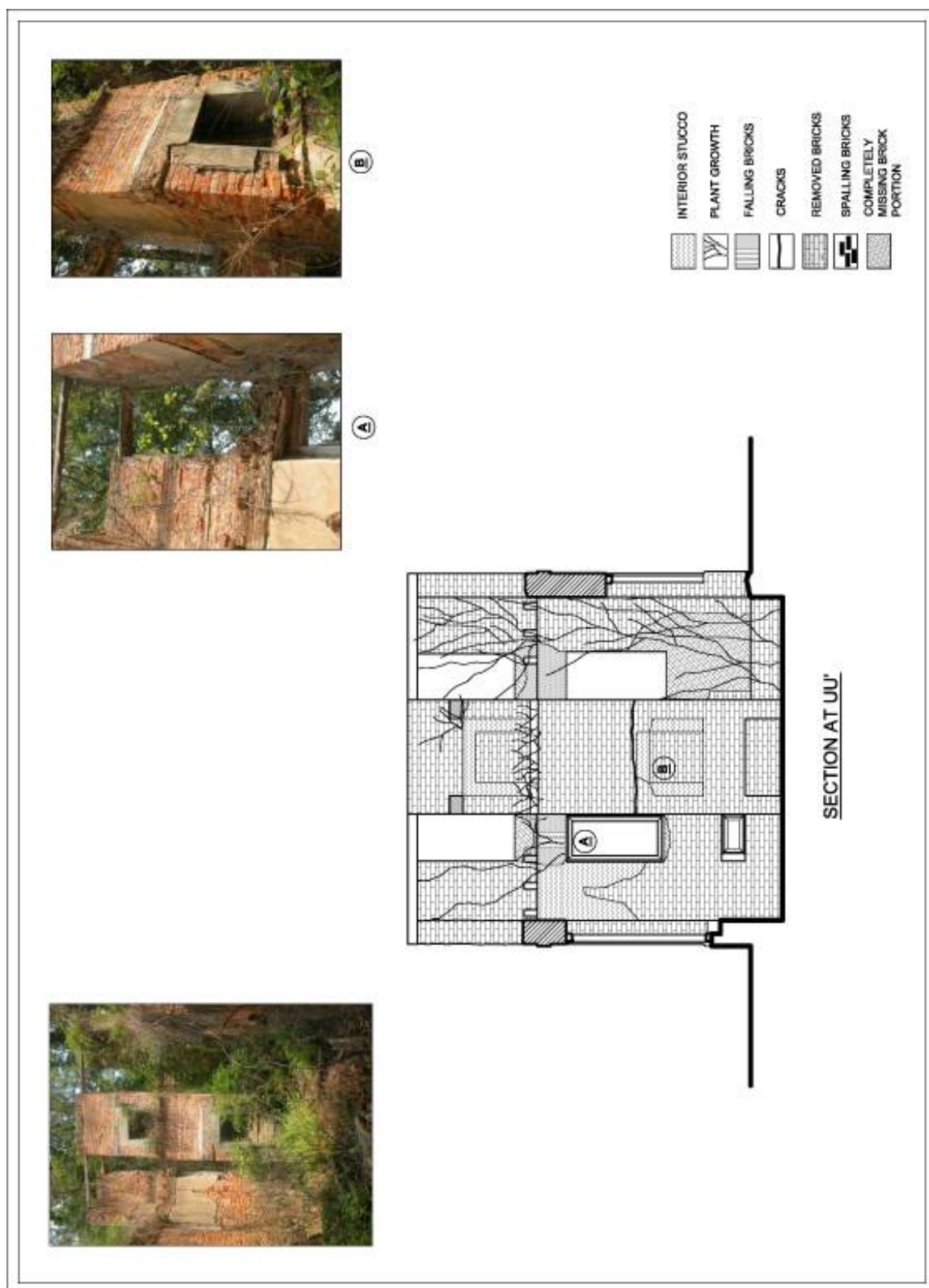
Comingtee House
Floor Plan



Comingtee House
Longitudinal Section



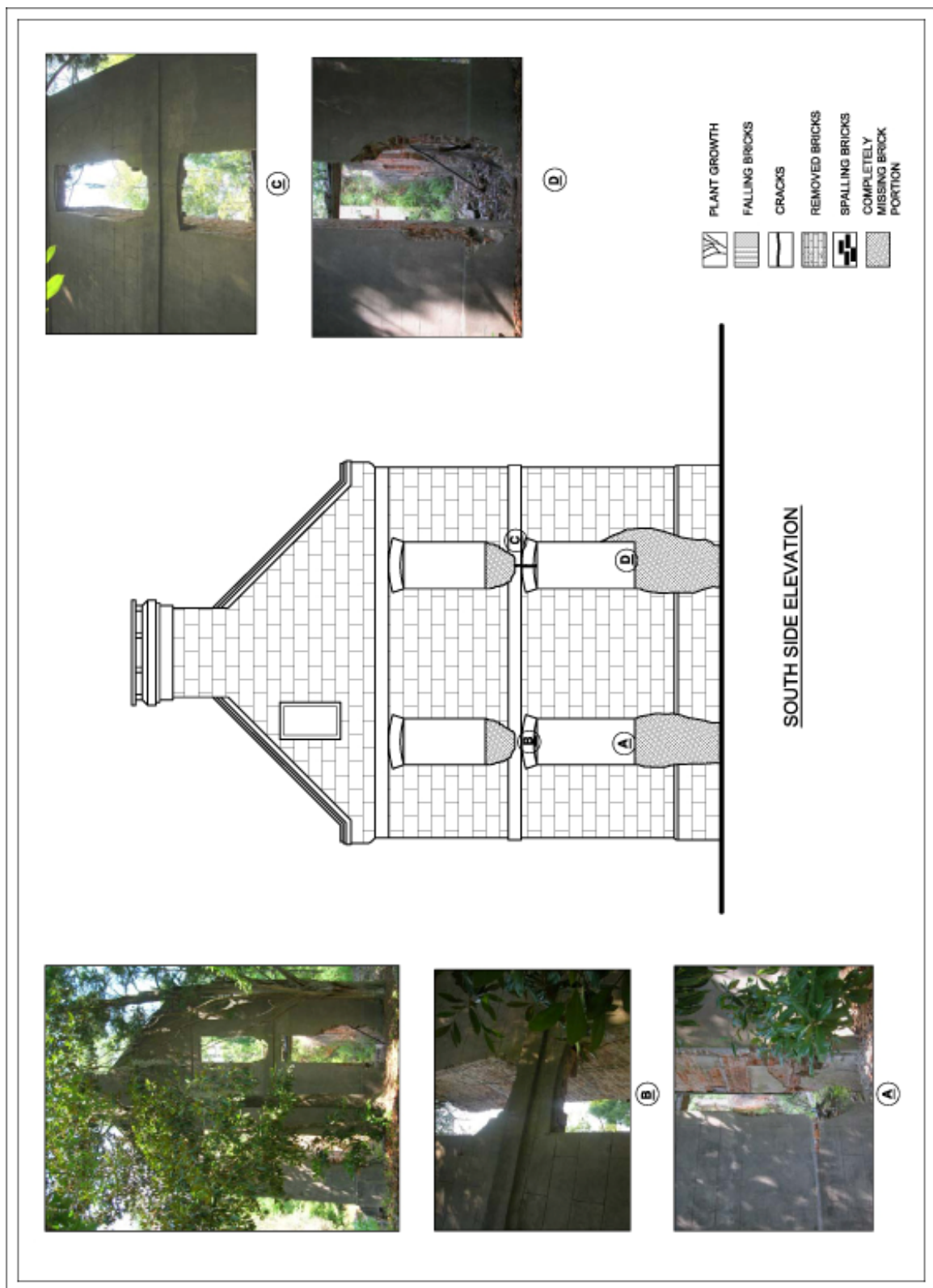
Comingtee House
Longitudinal Section



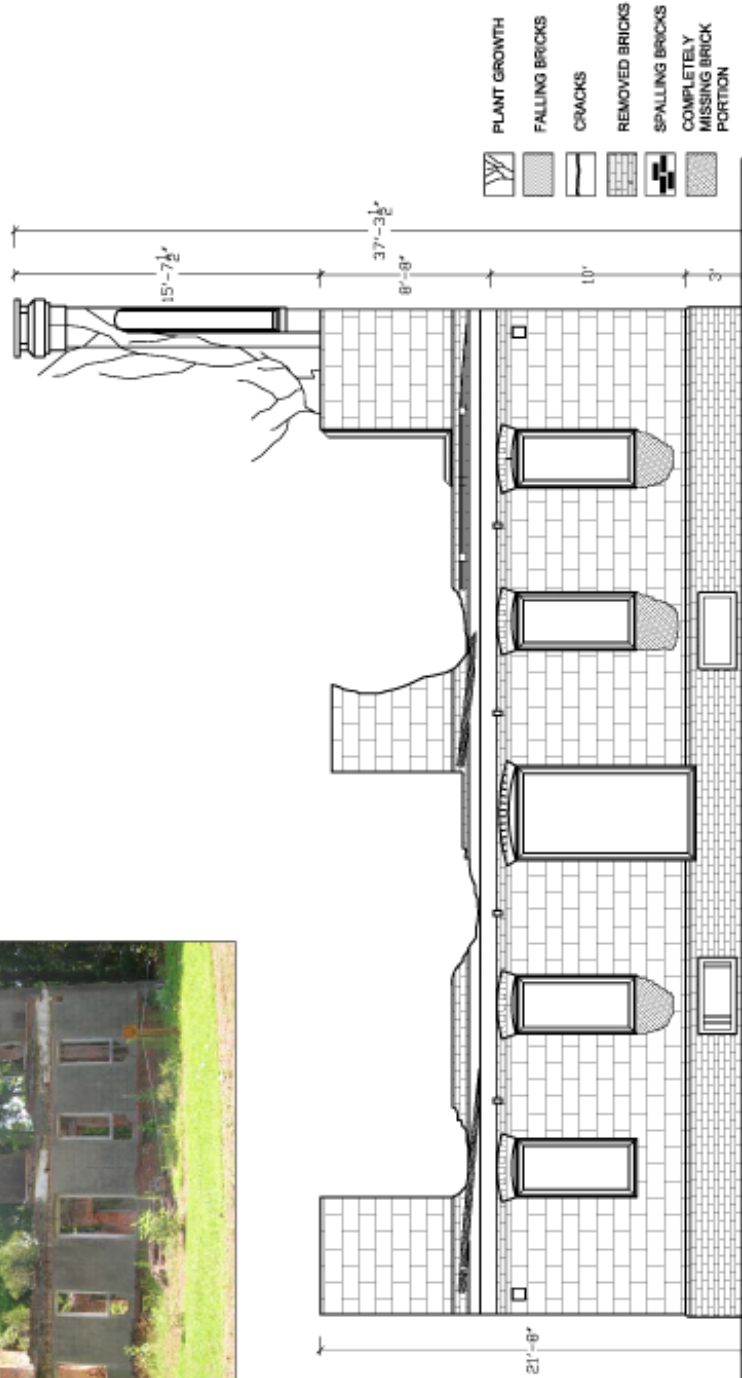
Comingtee House
Lateral Section



Comingtee House
Elevation

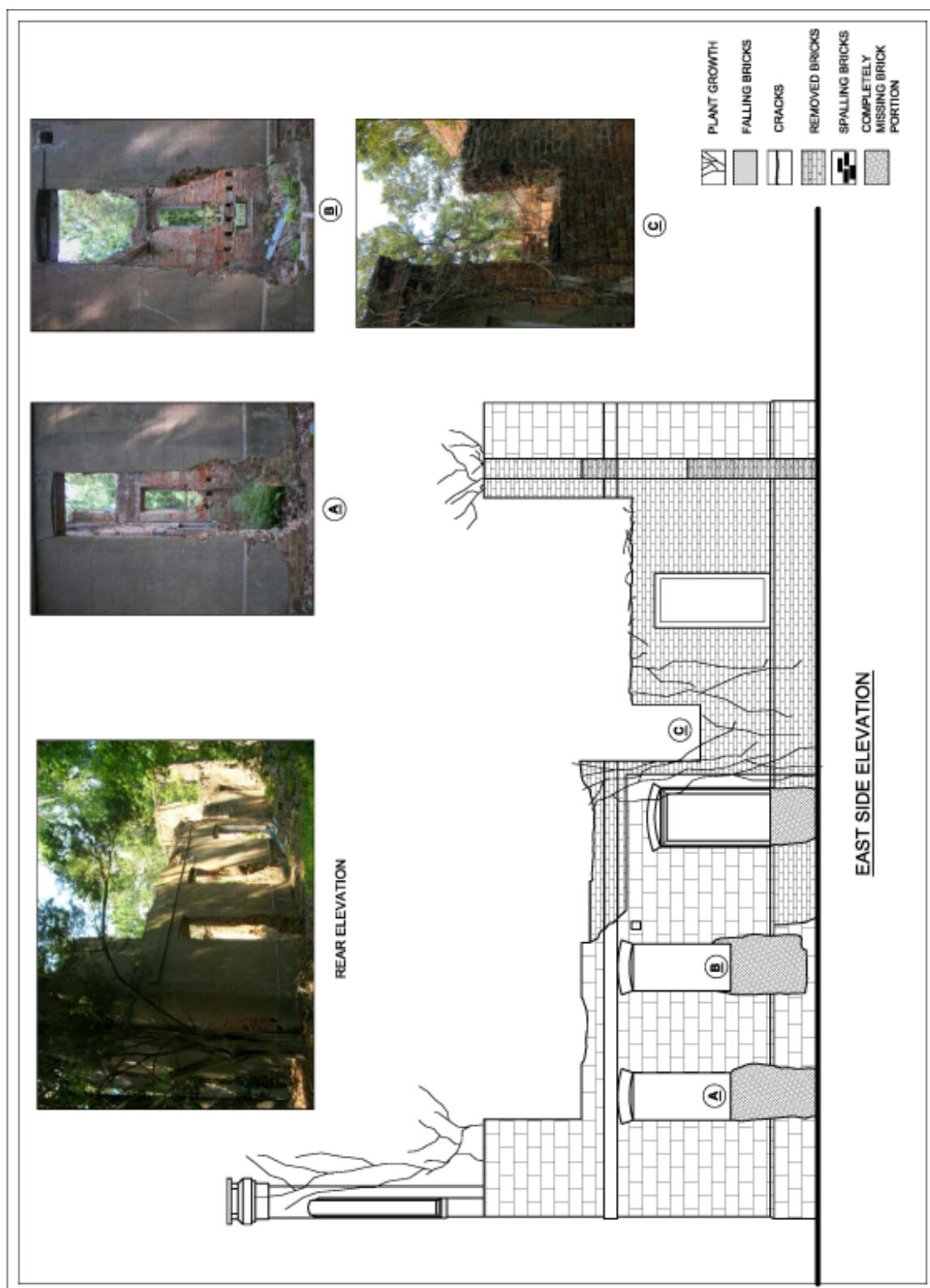


Comingtee House
Elevation

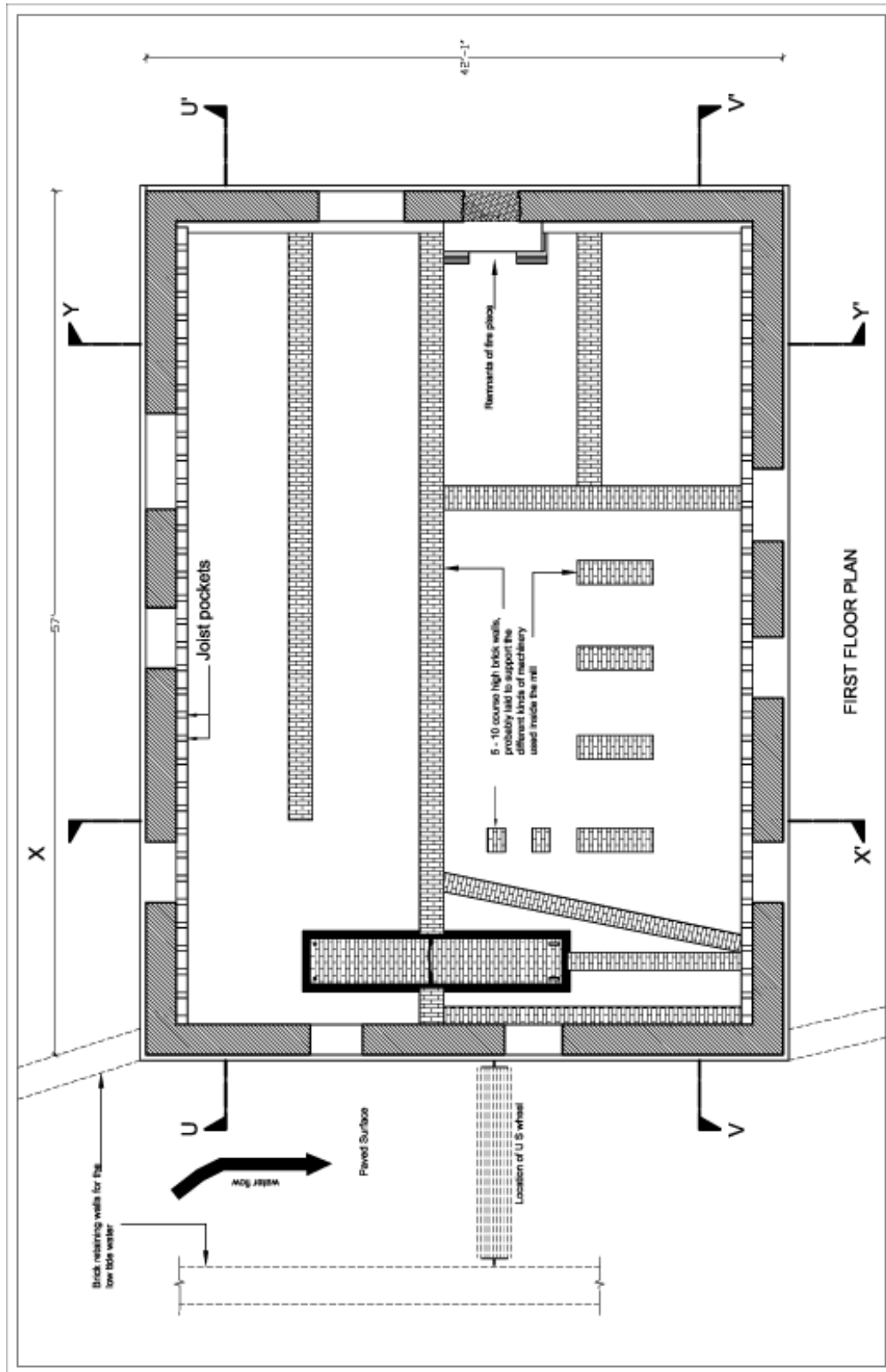


WEST SIDE ELEVATION

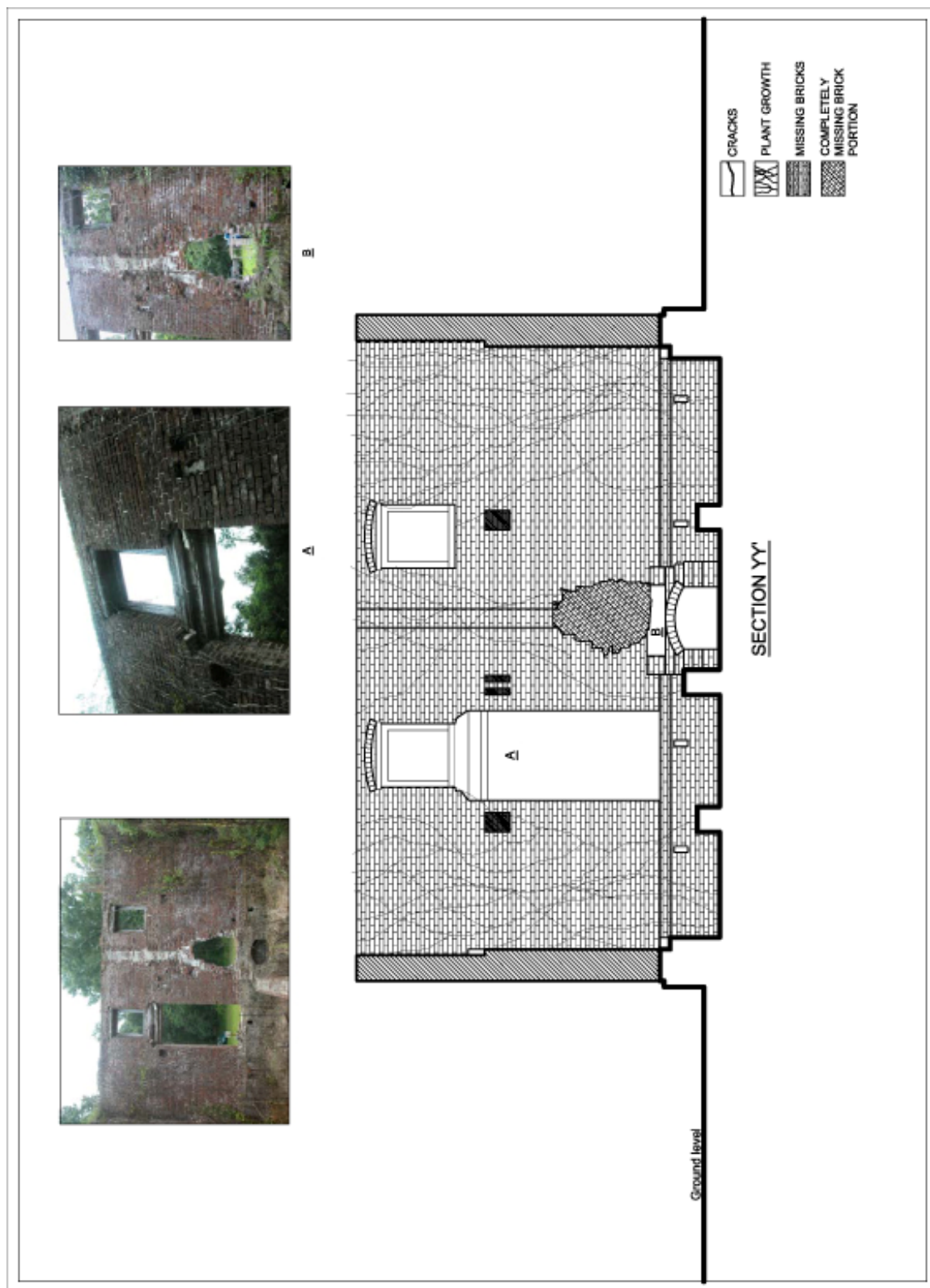
Comingtee House
Elevation



Comingtee House
Elevation



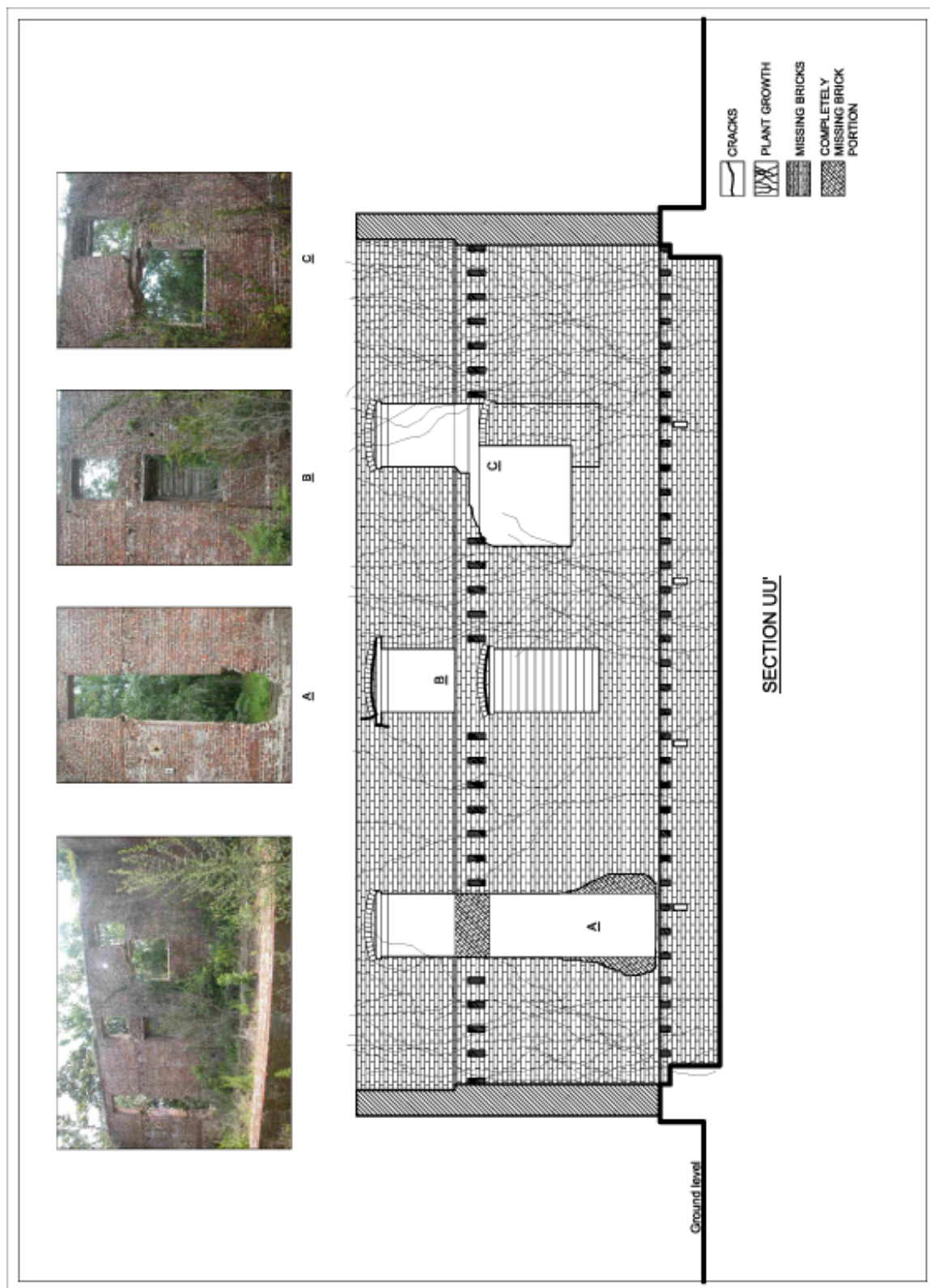
Stoke Rice Mill
Floor Plan



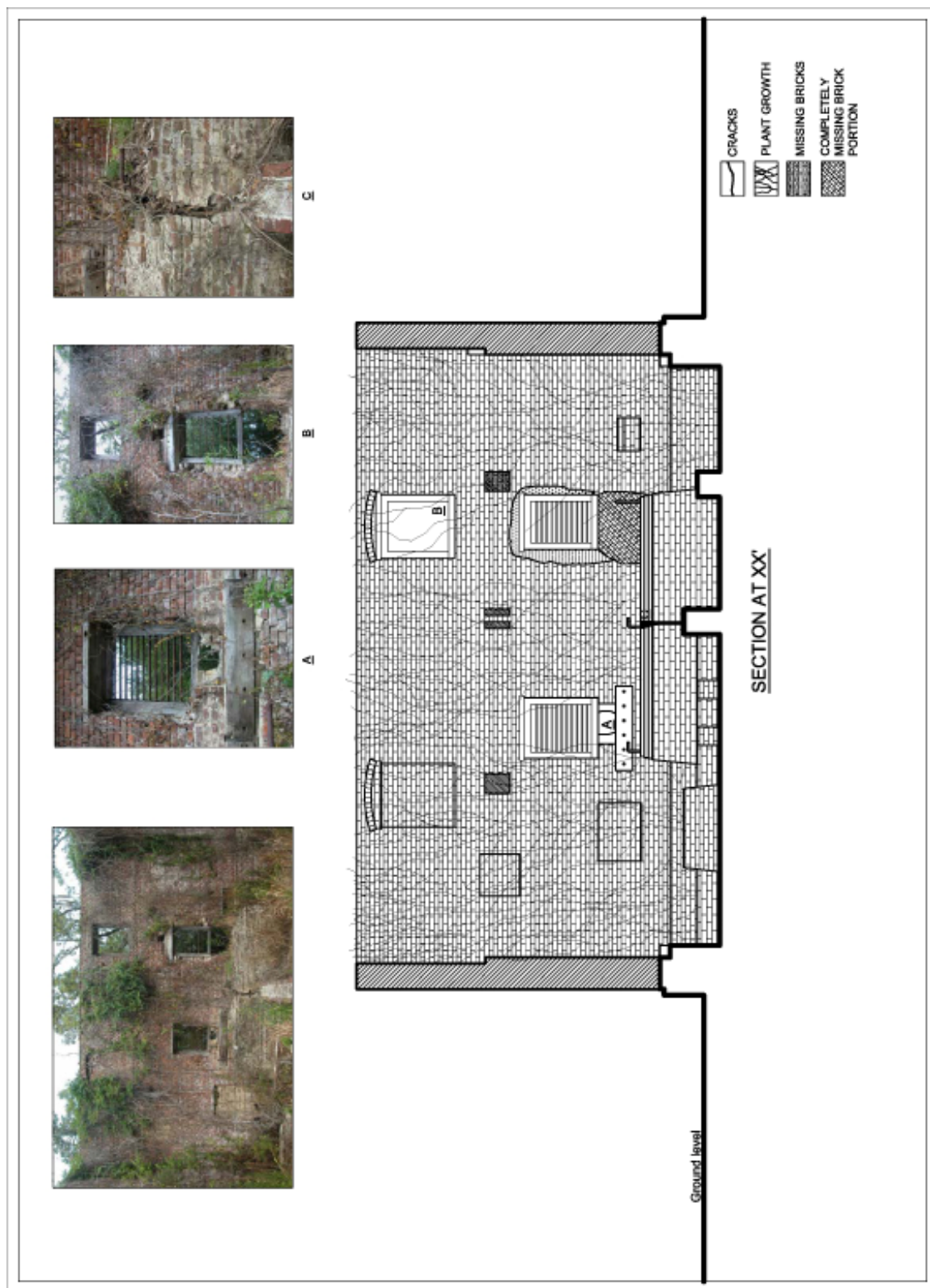
Stoke Rice Mill
Lateral Section



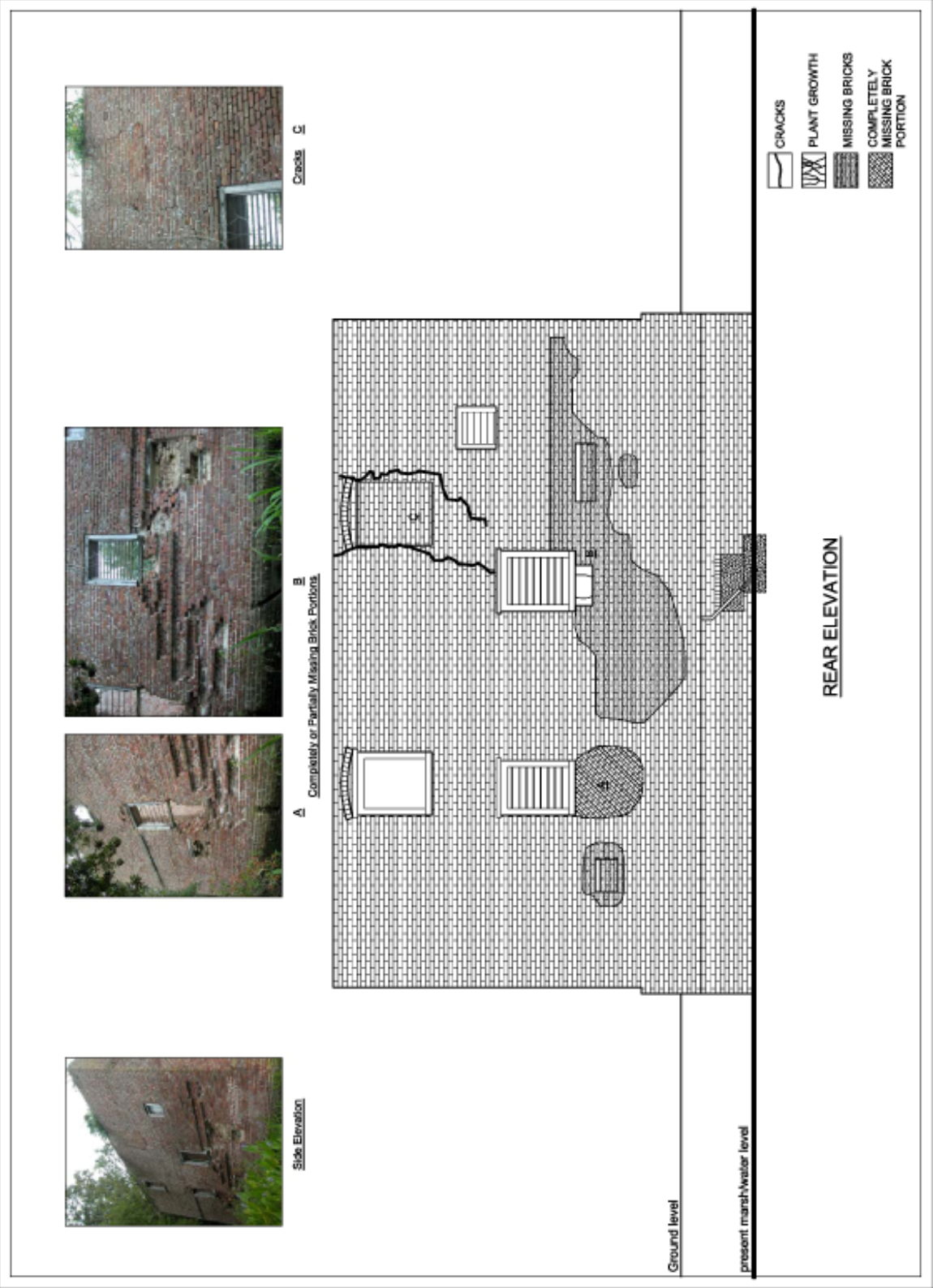
Stoke Rice Mill
Longitudinal Section



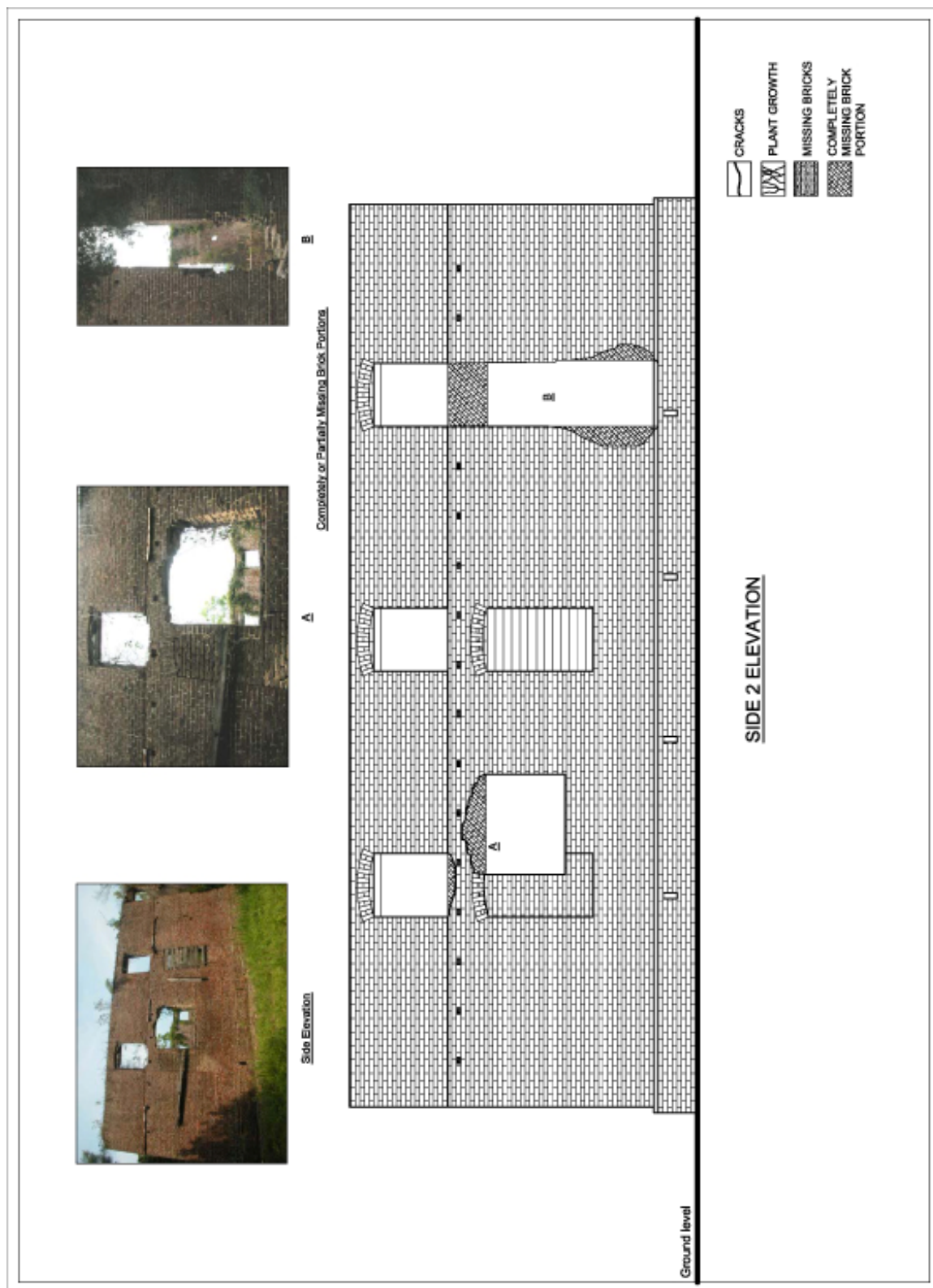
Stoke Rice Mill
Longitudinal Section



Stoke Rice Mill
Lateral Section



Stoke Rice Mill
Elevation



Stoke Rice Mill
Elevation

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