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BONE ARTIFACTS AT MONT REPOSE:  
POSSIBLE MOTIVATIONS FOR PRODUCTION AND TRADE

by

JAMES B. HARPER IV

(Under the Direction of Sue Mullins Moore)

ABSTRACT

Material culture is a vital component of archaeology. The identification and designation of artifacts and their uses can assist in contextualizing historical sites. At Mont Repose, a rice plantation inhabited during colonial and antebellum times, a structure has been partially excavated. Included in a collection of bone artifacts unearthed from this site are bone buttons, bone toothbrushes, bone handfan parts, bone lice combs, and artifacts thought to be parts of a needle case or a Yoruba status item. These items display a high degree of manipulation and offer many interesting hypotheses regarding slave plantation life. The bone artifacts associated with this building have helped the faculty and students responsible for this work better understand the possible occupation and activities that took place within.

INDEX WORDS: Bone artifacts, Mont Repose, Jasper County, South Carolina, Gillison family, Slavery, Rice plantation,

BONE ARTIFACTS AT MONT REPOSE:  
POSSIBLE MOTIVATIONS FOR PRODUCTION AND TRADE

by

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Bachelor of Arts, Georgia Southern University, 2001

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

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2009

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BONE ARTIFACTS AT MONT REPOSE:  
POSSIBLE MOTIVATIONS FOR PRODUCTION AND TRADE

by

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June 2009

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Jenny, Shelby, Coby-James, and Bay, without whom I may not have had the appropriate motivation to achieve all I can in life. I especially dedicate this thesis to my wife; she helped me see the way through my coursework and writing, and always supports me.

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I would like to acknowledge the guidance and knowledge passed to me by Sue Mullins Moore, my primary advisor and longtime instructor. Without her boundless knowledge this project would not be. Also, Lisa Denmark, who helped me construct my historiography and gave me insight into African-American culture. Steven Hale helped me begin my academic journey by being the first advisor to peak my interest in anthropology. Thanks to them all.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	6
LIST OF FIGURES .....	9
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	10
The Origins of the Slave Trade in the Carolinas.....	13
Slave Life on rice plantations .....	25
2 Description of bone artifacts and comparative studies .....	29
Origins of bone button use.....	32
Origins of bone toothbrush use .....	35
Origins of bone lice comb use .....	37
Origins of hand fan use.....	38
Comparative Studies .....	40
Levi Jordan Plantation, Texas.....	41
The Cabildo, Louisiana.....	42
Brunswick Town, North Carolina.....	43
Brimstone Hill, St. Kitts, British Virgin Islands.....	44
3 Mont Repose.....	46
The Gillison family .....	48
Archaeology of Mont Repose .....	52
4 Excavations and description of bone artifacts at Mont Repose .....	57
5 Conclusions.....	60



REFERENCES .....85

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Aerial Photo of Mont Repose; ca. 2008.....	74
Figure 2: Aerial Photo; Detail of the bluff area, ca. 2008 .....	74
Figure 3: Feature map of unit block .....	75
Figure 4: Feature map showing artifacts in original nine block unit.....	75
Figure 5: Photograph facing east, looking over units.....	76
Figure 6: Photo facing east, overlooking all nine units of original block .....	76
Figure 7: Button Type #15, FS #501 .....	77
Figure 8: Button Type #15, FS #381 .....	77
Figure 9: Button Type #15, FS #381 .....	78
Figure 10: Button Type #15, FS #548.....	78
Figure 11: Toothbrush fragment, FS #381 .....	79
Figure 12: Toothbrush fragment, FS #381 .....	79
Figure 13: Lice comb fragment, FS #380.....	80
Figure 14: Lice comb fragment, FS #680.....	80
Figure 15: Hand fan sticks, FS #548 .....	81
Figure 16: Diagram of hand fan anatomy.....	81
Figure 17: Possible needle case/flywhisk fragments, FS #549 .....	82
Figure 18: Possible needle case/flywhisk fragments, FS #598 .....	82
Figure 19: The item in the second row, furthest to the right .....	83
Figure 20: Bone handle knife, FS #430.....	83
Figure 21: Bone handled fork, FS #548 .....	84

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Mont Repose is located in Jasper County, South Carolina between Gillisonville and Coosawhatchie. This property can be reached by traveling west from Coosawhatchie on South Carolina Highway 462. The plantation as it exists today encompasses approximately five hundred acres owned by Martha Black. This tract of land is currently operated as a private hunting preserve and includes numerous ponds, agricultural fields, wooded areas, and the bluff which was likely the location of the planter's home and outbuildings. It is as yet undetermined where the slave quarters were located. Previous owners of this land were less than conservation-minded, which has resulted in a high occurrence of disturbance. There are also no historic buildings present at Mont Repose. Documentary research conducted by Dr. Moore and her many students have revealed much about the possible owners and inhabitants of this rice plantation.

There are no standing historical structures at Mont Repose, leaving only questions regarding their whereabouts. The oak avenue leads to the mobile home, grape arbor, and deer stands which occupy the proposed site of the main house. There is evidence to the east of this avenue, however, of another intentional tree planting which leads to a garage building. Archaeological excavations have been ongoing at Mont Repose since spring of 2000. Initial fieldwork activities including archival research, ground survey, surface collection, and mapping were conducted in 1999. This work led to a greater survey of the property. Vital information was collected during a series of posthole tests conducted

along surveyed grid lines. These efforts directed excavations and eliminated certain areas for the possibility of inhabitation contemporary with Mont Repose's colonial and antebellum occupation. Through the process of elimination, a bluff located directly south of the Coosawhatchie River was considered as the likely location for historical occupation at Mont Repose. Though the locations of the slave quarters, main house, and outbuildings are not known, there is evidence which indicates the presence of a slave dominated building in the N800 E800 area of our grid. The features associated with this structure include postholes, a significant chimney fall, a hearth, and a wide assortment of household artifacts. While conducting a search for the exact position of the main house, outbuildings, and slave quarters, evidence of wood framed structures has been uncovered on the bluff including distinct nail distributions, stains in the soil indicative of postholes, a chimney fall, and other features which can be considered the remnants of colonial and antebellum plantation buildings.

The worked bone objects described in this paper were excavated in two abutting units, N808 E800 and N808 E802. The southwest corners of these units exist along the same N/S axis of our grid but are two meters apart along the W/E axis. These artifacts originated from similar depths in these units. Many bone buttons which seem to demonstrate different stages of manufacture or modification as well as bones from *Sus scrofa*, domesticated pig, were recovered in N808 E800. Some of these buttons are rough on one side and polished on the other. This may indicate that these buttons had cloth attached over the polished surface, as described in many sources, or that the smooth surfaces faced outward and were worn smooth by common usage. In addition, two small, somewhat intact hand fan sticks were found in this unit. These objects were part of an

ornamental carved bone fan. N808 E802 also yielded numerous buttons similar to those found in N808 E800 including food bone (some of which could have been used in button production) and one fragment of what may be a fly whisk or, more likely, a needle case given the presence of sewing paraphernalia. There are also two smaller fragments which seem consistent with the size, decoration, and description of a turned bone needlecase found at the Cabildo Government Building in New Orleans. More mundane household items have been excavated from these units as well, including two carved bone toothbrush fragments, fragments of bone lice combs, and pieces of metal cutlery with bone handles. A bone handled fork was uncovered in N810 E800. The bone handled knife found in the multi-use structure was found in N808 E800. This varied assortment of everyday items seems to confirm the designation of this structure as a multi-use area, likely dominated by African-American slaves.

In *Back of the Big House* and *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts*, John Michael Vlach describes the varied and specialized skills developed by some early African-Americans. His work has illuminated the realities faced by slaves and their attempts to adapt to a harsh reality. In *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts*, the author discusses a traveling assemblage of African-American made artifacts which toured the country during the late 1970s. This work is important when considering the cultural adaptations made by slaves during the creation of a new sub-culture. The African and European influences upon handmade objects represent the assimilation of both into a single material culture. Some of the objects created by African-American hands were done to satisfy creative whim and artistic expression. Many objects were created from necessity and stand as a physical representation of the creolization of

European and African cultures. This publication and the collection it describes are important tools any scholar can apply when researching the material culture of African-Americans and the distinctive origins of people and objects.

This study is an attempt to describe and contextualize these artifacts. Many aspects of colonial, antebellum, and postbellum southern history and culture are examined and presented as evidence in the investigation of the bone artifacts described herein. Further excavations will provide more information about this assemblage of bone artifacts.

### **The Origins of the Slave Trade in Carolinas**

The British and other European countries played an important part in the North American slave trade after the Spanish and Portuguese began to recede from the Americas. New European colonies needed slave labor and merchants obliged. By the end of the seventeenth century, British colonists realized that African slaves were cheaper and easier to control than white indentured servants.<sup>1</sup> The Dutch and British began to slowly introduce African slaves to satisfy labor requirements in their respective American colonies. For some time, the colonies acquired slaves from Caribbean Islands. Over time, as demand for slaves grew, Europeans journeyed to Africa itself to fill their slave ships. Indeed, during the early eighteenth century direct trade began between Carolina and slave merchants from Africa.<sup>2</sup> Virginia, Carolina, and other colonies needed African slave labor to conduct the many operations associated with tobacco, rice, indigo, and other types of agriculture. Beginning in the seventeenth century, planters took advantage

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<sup>1</sup> Stamp, Kenneth. pg. 24, Genovese, Eugene. pg. 34

<sup>2</sup> Thomas, Hugh. pg. 258; Joyner, Charles. pg. 14

of their close proximity to Charleston, a major marketplace for African slaves, and bought thousands of men, women, and children to work and live on their plantations.

The lack of stability in the colonies made it difficult for Africans to adapt and form set cultural groups and customs.<sup>3</sup> In the lower South enslaved African-Americans took advantage of various opportunities to improve their lives. The seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries saw a different form of slavery than the type characterized by the plantation system, which came about after staple product agriculture was refined. The “Society with Slaves”, as described by Erskine Clarke in his book *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic*, was typified by the variance in economic resources. The many different pursuits designated slaves as only one form of labor to be exploited among many others.<sup>4</sup> In this climate of trade, Africans were able to adopt a certain social flexibility or fluidity which benefited them to a substantial degree. Africans born in the Americas, or creoles, made up the majority of the slave population by the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> They were able to trade to a certain extent with Europeans and attain status with greater ease due to the model set forth by Atlantic Creoles in Spain, Portugal, and Western Africa. Africans learned different languages and developed their skills of communication and negotiation. They were able to pursue freedom occasionally because of their social acumen. Africans in the Americas of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries used their intelligence and skill to educate themselves in legal matters. In some cases they were able to defend their freedom with this new found knowledge. Atlantic Creoles, as Berlin calls them, were astute and claimed Christianity to an extent in the attempt to further

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<sup>3</sup> Fogel, Robert William. pg. 31

<sup>4</sup> Berlin, Ira. pp. 24-25, Genovese, Eugene. pg.4

<sup>5</sup> Fogel, Robert William. pg. 31

assimilate into European society.<sup>6</sup> Atlantic Creoles were also able to take advantage of relative stability and form family units. Certain African-American family lines in Virginia were continued for generations and included wealthy landowners and slaveholders. Initially, slaves arrived in the South in small numbers and proved valuable to European-Americans in the face of rising labor demands and defense concerns. The Spanish presence in Florida cast a shadow of fear and uncertainty on the lower South. The tenuous relationship between the British and the Spanish colonies precipitated numerous attacks and counterattacks. Atlantic Creoles were able to assist European-Americans in the defense of their land and assert their value in many ways.<sup>7</sup> European Americans recognized the service given by or required of Africans in early South Carolina. Military service allowed individual slaves to negotiate a more tolerable social position and move closer to attaining freedom and equality by their own merit. The labor systems and living conditions associated with different agricultural pursuits varied greatly and influenced the importation of African and Atlantic Creole slaves. These types of families were not as established in South Carolina and the lower South due to varying populations and labor demands.

The advantages fostered by Atlantic Creoles were not to last. The different constituents of Europe held separate attitudes toward slavery and the advancement of African slaves and freed persons. The Spanish and Portugese treated Atlantic Creoles differently than the English and French. The very qualities that distinguished Atlantic Creoles and set them on the path toward social achievement rendered them undesirable in North America during the coming decades. European-Americans held suspicions

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<sup>6</sup> Genovese, Eugene. pg. 187

<sup>7</sup> Berlin, Ira. pp. 67-68



regarding the traditions and capabilities of these culturally advanced groups. The image of an African man or woman who could self-educate, survive and prosper in the marketplace economy, pursue and perpetuate their own freedom, and potentially assimilate into European society was incongruous with the type of slave the developing plantation regime desired. Native Americans were also taken into chattel bondage by plantation owners. Due to harsh work and living conditions, Native American numbers were greatly reduced by slavery.<sup>8</sup> Division and warfare among tribes took their toll as well. These conditions rendered them an unfit source of labor. Plantation owners needed slaves who could be manipulated and used to the benefit of the paternalist master. Upon receiving their human cargo, slave owners attempted to strip Africans of everything that they retained of their homeland. Planters attacked their slaves psychologically and tried to pry them away from their “name, village, clan, household, and family.”<sup>9</sup> Slaveowners treated newly arrived African slaves as cheap labor and their high death toll did not concern planters. Indeed, some estimates state that as many as one quarter of new arrivals from West Africa died within the first year of their forced immigration. Through this course of events and social actions, the planter class of the lowcountry turned South Carolina rice plantation agriculture into a “Slave Society”.<sup>10</sup>

The relative advantages and success enjoyed by Africans in the European sphere of influence was radically changed by the discovery and development of staple agricultural goods or raw materials. The course of slavery in North America followed different paths based upon the demand for slaves and the product specific to each region. The initial demand for enslaved individuals to cultivate the new staples of southern

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<sup>8</sup> Stamp, Kenneth, pg. 17

<sup>9</sup> Berlin, Ira, pg. 112

<sup>10</sup> Berlin, Ira, pg. 112

agriculture was small. In seventeenth century South Carolina, the work force was mixed. Europeans of many origins pursued many economic and trade opportunities mostly with the help of European servants. European servants which formed the bulk of the workforce in early North America were attaining status and land through their own efforts. The opportunities for indentured servants to acquire land and even slaves to begin their own endeavors proved too tempting to a class of Europeans accustomed to servitude.

The first black forced immigrants who came into South Carolina by way of Barbados and other Caribbean islands resembled the Atlantic Creoles in that they were able to advance and create a distinctive identity in European dominated parts of the world. Some came voluntarily while others resisted and were brought against their wishes when their owners immigrated to North America. They could speak European languages such as Spanish, English, and French. Some adopted Christian religion in an attempt to further assimilate into mainstream culture. The previous experiences of Atlantic Creoles served as motivation for these first generations of African-Americans arriving in North America. They immediately attempted to re-establish their place not as possessions but relevant humans focused on social ascent. However, the emerging European-American planter class quickly rebuffed them.<sup>11</sup> White Americans perceived the efforts of Africans for what they were: an attempt to rise to an elevated status. This would certainly have been a positive development in North American history, but it was not to be. Unfortunately for Atlantic Creoles, they were marginalized by the planter class and exported to the North and to the many island nations of the Caribbean due to the social threat symbolized by their advanced social and economic skills. Slaveholders of

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<sup>11</sup> Berlin, Ira. pp. 64-65, Genovese, Eugene. pg. 5

lower status could not compete with the capital and proximity to Charleston and Savannah enjoyed by plantation owners in the lower South. They were often forced to accept individuals whom they deemed undesirable in order to satisfy their labor demands.<sup>12</sup> Beginning in the 1720s, the economy for staple products developed and enslaved Africans were imported into South Carolina by the thousands. Slaveowners punished their slaves beyond the realm of humanity for simple crimes. Punishment was a tool of oppression used to generate fear and compliance among African-American slaves. Slaveowners and overseers conducted whippings and other punishments in the open to demonstrate the consequences of disobedience. White North Americans associated with plantation agriculture would not tolerate social advancement in their slaves. The further developed African-American culture became, the more difficult slave labor was to control and apply to agricultural efforts. European-American plantation owners assumed that they would find the men and women they needed in West Africa, and they did by the thousands. The future of the emerging plantation regime was determined by the proficiency with which slave labor and agricultural process could be manipulated.<sup>13</sup>

In colonial and antebellum South Carolina, slaves typically outnumbered their owners to a large degree. The continuous importation of slaves from Africa to feed the plantation system precipitated this imbalance. In his book, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, Ira Berlin gives detailed and insightful descriptions of the first slaves in the Americas. During the first part of the eighteenth century, African slaves outnumbered white South Carolinians almost two-to-one in the

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas, Hugh. pg. 258

<sup>13</sup> Stampp, Kenneth. pg. 24

lowcountry.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the traumatic effects of the Middle Passage, harsh living conditions, and high production demands of profit hungry planters all worked in tandem and took a deadly toll on enslaved Africans and Caribbeans during the eighteenth century. In some of the most productive parishes along the coast and near Charleston, the ratio of black residents to white residents was extended to more than three-to-one. And indeed, by mid century, the majority of the population in the entire lowcountry of South Carolina was nearly sixty percent African-American slaves.<sup>15</sup> Many primary accounts of South Carolina during colonial and antebellum times describe the population as overwhelmingly African, with the many black inhabitants and an aesthetic created by their distinctive clothing, language, housing, and customs. The number of African-American slaves present in South Carolina saw variance during the rest of the eighteenth century due to many factors, naturally occurring and socially precipitated.

The South Carolina lowcountry was an unhealthy place. The swamp areas and their stagnant waters gave rise to many harmful insects and reptiles. Planters assumed that Africans would be more tolerant to the native diseases of the lowcountry. They were proven wrong when their new charges were just as susceptible to sickness and high mortality rates resulted. This caused an imbalance in slave populations.

Initially, planters sought mostly young African males. They were perceived to have the strength and resilience required to live and work in the lowcountry of South Carolina. Planters were also concerned with the cultural origins of Africans.<sup>16</sup> Cultural background is a valuable reference used by archeologists when describing material culture. Certain cultural backgrounds marked some Africans as undesirable. Young

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<sup>14</sup> Stamp, Kenneth. pg. 25; Fogel, Robert William. pg. 29

<sup>15</sup> Berlin, Ira. pp. 143-144

<sup>16</sup> Stamp, Kenneth. pg. 48; Thomas, Hugh. pg. 399

African males were brought into Charleston in great numbers to be subsequently diffused to the numerous plantations in the region. They were housed in “squalid dormitories” and denied some basic necessities in the name of profit.<sup>17</sup> These factors affected the balance necessary for African-American slaves to have children and simulate some type of consistent material and social culture. Slaves did not bear children in substantial numbers until the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup> After they were able to forge families, slaves achieved more natural rates of birth and mortality. Once stability was approached, the conception and diffusion of African-American culture in the South began.

The emphasis upon rice culture in South Carolina caused an insatiable demand for African slaves. The individuals forced into North America by the slave trade served the purpose of the slave owner, but inhibited the progress of the developing African international identity. The flood of new arrivals washed over the “charter generations” of Africans and inundated their creolized culture.<sup>19</sup> Luckily, the surge of the plantation regime slowed but did not destroy the development of African-American culture. The complexion of slavery, however, was changed forever in the Americas. The mixed culture of creoles met the raw visage of African practices and fell by the wayside. As Atlantic-Creoles disappeared in the South, their habits went with them. If the culture of Atlantic-Creoles persisted, the plantation system in the South may have been very different. The assimilation and equality sought by Atlantic-Creoles may have imbalanced the labor pool and hindered the expansion of large scale plantation agriculture. The socially displaced state of African slaves made them pliable and therefore more attractive

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<sup>17</sup> Berlin, Ira. pg. 149

<sup>18</sup> Berlin, Ira. pg. 149; Fogel, Robert William. pg. 152

<sup>19</sup> Berlin, Ira. pp. 64-65

to plantation owners. African slaves faced a world in which many of their companions did not speak the same language or follow the same customs, and cruelty at the hands of European-Americans was commonplace.

In Africa, there was no sense of general nationality that permeated its inhabitants prior to their abduction. Their loyalties and remembrances were connected to small villages, clans, and families. Slaves were taken from many regions in Africa. These regions included Senegambia, Upper Guinea, the Gold Coast, Bight of Benin, and Bight of Biafra. Today, these regions cover an area encompassing the countries of Senegal, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, North Angola, Liberia, and Gabon. Africans taken from their homes and placed in the Americas brought with them unique material and cultural traditions which could not be fully dissolved by the horrors of abduction, the Middle Passage, and the dehumanizing experience of being sold as property. Enslaved Africans constructed a more encompassing identity in order to ease the difficulties often created by diversity within a group.<sup>20</sup> The cultural identity African-Americans constructed was very much a product of their shared experiences in North America as well as Africa.<sup>21</sup>

Civil unrest was never far from the surface of the swirling waters of lowcountry plantation society. African and European peoples existed in a tenuous balance of social interaction and negotiation. The violent mistreatment of slaves eventually failed to accomplish the goals of oppression. As slaves gained power and confidence, revolt sometimes occurred. The Stono Rebellion of 1739 and Nat Turner's Rebellion of 1831

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<sup>20</sup> Fogel, Robert William. pg. 168

<sup>21</sup> Berlin, Ira. pp. 104-105

demonstrated the potential power wielded by slave leaders locally.<sup>22</sup> The actions of rebellious slaves also brought revenge down upon Africa-Americans of all regions. Slaveowners curtailed customary privileges such as weapon ownership (in some cases) and travel between plantations and towns because of the fear harbored by white Southerners. Planters also punished their slaves severely and excessively for crimes that would not have tempted the lash prior to times of insurrection. White Southerners sometimes hunted and killed those directly involved in rebellions for their actions or deported them from their families and homes. Some of the individuals involved in the Stono rebellion traveled into Florida and were harbored by the Spanish. The unrest of slaves, however, most likely precipitated better working and living conditions in the future. Planters realized after facing the dangers of revolt that the high population density of slaves coupled with disenfranchisement could lead to dire consequences if improperly managed.

Many events which occurred during the tumultuous years of the 1730s damaged the rice economy. England's war with Spain removed part of the market for rice while restrictions on the slave trade made it difficult for planters to replenish their labor force.<sup>23</sup> African-American slaves may have benefited from the momentary depression of the rice market. As a result of decreasing profits, plantation communities turned inward. Slaves were encouraged to produce their own goods to supplement diminished provisions. This institutionally-encouraged self dependence had an important impact upon the plantation system in South Carolina. The economic savings associated with slave self-sufficiency and the exploration of other crops including indigo re-energized the plantation system for

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<sup>22</sup> Genovese, Eugene. pg. 54; Stamp, Kenneth. pg. 135

<sup>23</sup> Berlin, Ira. pg. 147

owners while increasing hardship for slaves. Through the second half of the eighteenth century, the plantation system flourished and planters became richer. Restrictions upon the slave trade eased and European-Americans became more absent from their plantations.<sup>24</sup> Left in their place were overseers, drivers, and the task system.

The task based labor system was typical of the antebellum period.<sup>25</sup> The absence of a master and the time afforded by task-based labor allowed slaves little relief from the oppression of the developing plantation system. Rice and indigo were extremely difficult and time consuming crops. The constant demand of their time and efforts weakened slaves and added to their discontent. When Revolutionary sentiment crept into the South, slaves saw increased opportunity and incentive to flee from their homes. The British were reputed to take slaves and transport them to freedom. This was not always the case, but negative experiences likely did nothing to dissuade slaves if they wanted to leave the plantation. The Revolutionary period also gave rise to feelings of uncertainty regarding how the outcome of war might influence the plantation system.<sup>26</sup> The idea of freedom likely inspired elation for some slaves and fear for others. Some slaves may have relished the thought of leaving their homes and work in the hope of pursuing a free life. Slaves were encouraged by the negative conditions of their captivity to flee to the swamps in order to escape from the rigors of plantation life. The resulting maroon communities were likely an attractive alternative for the brave. Though they were despised and hunted, maroons enjoyed greater relative autonomy and freedom.

Others may have been less motivated to leave the relative safety and assurances of plantation life for an uncertain existence. Perhaps those who felt bound to the fields were

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<sup>24</sup> Berlin, Ira. pp. 147-148; Genovese, Eugene. pg. 10

<sup>25</sup> Joyner, Charles. pg. 43

<sup>26</sup> Fogel, Robert William. pg. 63



from the laborer class, afraid to enter a new world with little practical skill. Many slaves had sufficient motivation to leave their plantations behind. African-American slaves escaped by the thousands and sought a free existence. The loss of slaves suffered by southern plantation owners was immense. Some planters employed methods to discourage escape including exile to the interior of the lower South as well as separation of families and groups. The outcome of the War for American Independence quickly diminished any immediate hopes for freedom harbored by slaves. The plantation system remained in place in the South.

After the cessation of hostilities between the British and newly independent Americans, southern plantation owners did not consider ending slavery. While slaveowners in the North were already considering the “eventual demise” of slavery, southern planters sought to replenish their slave populations and continue the profitable plantation system.<sup>27</sup> South Carolina re-entered the international slave trade in 1803 until the Federal Government intervened in 1808. During this time some forty thousand slaves were imported into the state.<sup>28</sup> According to their own standards of judgment, rice planters were prudent in their defense. Agriculture dependent upon slave labor was the foundation of the South’s economy. They tried to encourage reform of the slave-based labor system but not necessarily abolition.

Planters were self-righteously assured of their paternalistic approach toward slave management. Some were well intentioned slaveholders and always attempted to provide for their charges. Even their best efforts to provision their slaves stood to be thwarted, however, by unusual or uncontrollable circumstances sometimes associated with

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<sup>27</sup> Berlin, Ira. pg. 290

<sup>28</sup> Stampp, Kenneth. pg. 25

intensive agriculture such as crop loss, economic hardship, and material shortages. Regardless of slaveowners' efforts to care for their slaves, African-Americans should not have been in bondage.

### **Slave Life on Rice Plantations**

The peoples of West Africa cultivated the African strain of rice, *Oryza glaberrima*, as early as 2000-3000 years ago. They developed their own techniques and tools for planting and harvesting rice over the subsequent millennia.<sup>29</sup> These tools and methods were retained directly from Africa, displaying the continuance of slaves' native culture into North America. The techniques created and used by Africans were vital to the success of rice cultivation in North America. Rice was a "hard master" before and after the task system and tidal rice cultivation took hold during the early to mid 1700s. The growing and harvesting seasons often overlapped each other, increasing the weight and diversity of the slaves' workload.<sup>30</sup> It would be decades before a more efficient model for labor emerged and began to offer certain benefits to plantation slaves.<sup>31</sup> Prior to the development and dominance of tidal rice agriculture in the mid 1700s, the rice economy emanated from the upland regions of South Carolina. Rice agriculture was distinctive because of the endless preparation and maintenance of irrigation systems and volunteer flora control. Slaves constructed and operated the endless earthworks which harnessed and directed the rainfall characteristic of the uplands. The springtime marked the beginning of field preparations.<sup>32</sup> Armed with hoes, workers shaped and rendered the fields to receive rice seeds. Slaves used their hands and feet to sow the seeds into the

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<sup>29</sup> Trinkley, Michael and Fick, Sarah. pg. 2

<sup>30</sup> Joyner, Charles. pg. 45

<sup>31</sup> Trinkley and Fick. pg. 11

<sup>32</sup> Joyner, Charles. pp. 45-48

soil. The method of punching a hole in the earth, dropping a seed, and covering the hole with the foot was common to Africans familiar with rice production. As fields were drained during the process, other slaves took on the task of weed elimination, attacking the ever present and invasive volunteer plant life with their hoes. During the growing times, fields were flooded at alternating times and as a result, the fields sometimes emanated a foul stench. Slaves were faced with alternating periods of lighter work and back-wrenching effort. Rice fields were drained and flooded many times during the season to achieve the best growing conditions for the rice plants. After the rice reached the end of its growth, slaves harvested the grain, separated the heads from the stalk with flailing sticks, and then the slaves tasked with the separation of the rice grains from their hulls took over. Slaves “fanned” the hulls using winnowing baskets to separate the internal parts of the chaff from the rice grain itself. Finally, slaves “pounded” the remaining parts of the grain and its hull using mortars made from logs, and long pestles made of pine.<sup>33</sup> The skills required to refine rice grain became somewhat obsolete during the middle of the nineteenth century, when rice mills were improved and became more numerous.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to precipitation-dependent inland farming, tidal rice cultivation utilized the many rivers and creeks in the coastal plains of South Carolina which are subject to tidal cycles of the Atlantic Ocean. Slaves manipulated the water of rivers and rice agriculture became more efficient. Although this agricultural phenomenon may have begun as early as 1738, the methods associated with tidal cultivation were not

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<sup>33</sup> Joyner, Charles. pp. 45-48

<sup>34</sup> Joyner, Charles. pp. 45-48

commonplace for another fifty years<sup>35</sup>. In a paper entitled, *Rice Cultivation, Processing, and Marketing in the Eighteenth Century*, Michael Trinkley and Sarah Fick cite a secondary source which describes tidal cultivation. In her book, *Black Rice: The Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*, Judith Carney describes tidal cultivation as such:

First slaves constructed levees, or rice banks, around the rectangular-shaped plots on the mudflats. The rice field was embanked at sufficient height to prevent tidal spillover, with banks often reaching six feet in height. Earth removed in the process resulted in an adjacent canal, while openings in the river bank admitted inflow of the tidal water onto the field. The next step involved dividing the area into quarter sections (of ten to thirty acres) with river water delivered through secondary ditches. This elaborate system of water control enabled the adjustment of land units to labor demands and allowed slaves to sow rice directly into the floodplain. Sluices built into the embankment and field sections operated as valves for flooding and drainage. When opened at high tide, the tide flooded the field. Closed at low tide, the water remained on the crop. Opened again on the ebb tide, excess water was drained away from the plot<sup>36</sup>

Though tidal rice methods were more efficient, the extensive methodology created more labor for African-Americans. This also spurred importation of Africans and swelled plantation populations.

Under these conditions, slaves had even more motivation to leave plantation life. They fled in numbers and were hunted or returned voluntarily. The development of the task system offered slaves free time not usually associated with rice farming. As they filled this spare time with gardens, livestock, and personal pursuits, the enslaved recognized the value of this relative freedom and sought more of it. Slaves became advocates for themselves and employed many methods to defend their off times. The task based labor system afforded slaves the ability to accomplish their tasks as quickly or slowly as they pleased provided they were pursued to completion. Planters and overseers assigned tasks based upon the age and physical capability of the individual. The slaves

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<sup>35</sup> Clifton. Pg. 275

<sup>36</sup> Carney. Pg. 92

living on plantations which operated on a task based labor system had much more free time and liberty to pursue activities not associated with crop cultivation than did those under a gang system.<sup>37</sup> Traditionally, slaves were given Sunday to pursue religion and subsistence activities and in some instances, Saturday evenings as well.<sup>38</sup> African-American slaves used this time to produce many things to improve their diet, pocketbooks, and relative independence. This also provided the opportunity for slaves to pursue trade (illicit or otherwise) with each other and possibly nearby poor white residents or maroon populations, which may have inhabited the swamps and wilderness often found in the rural lowcountry. Gradually, enslaved African-Americans discovered and established the power which accompanied their position as the dominant labor force in the South. Slaves began to feel further entitled to their free time and thus, the power and control of planters began to erode. The very benefits of tidal rice production and the task system enjoyed by planters proved disadvantageous in many ways as well.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Joyner, pg. 43

<sup>38</sup> Joyner, pg.127

<sup>39</sup> Trinkley and Fick, pg. 10

## Chapter 2

### Description of comparative studies and bone artifacts

At the Levi Jordan Plantation in Brazoria County, Texas, Kenneth Brown of the University of Houston discovered evidence of hand-carved items including a bone handled flywhisk as well as some pieces believed to be from a “conjurer’s kit”.<sup>40</sup> These items are important to the study of bone artifacts at Mont Repose because of their social, political, and religious relevance. The bone artifacts found at the Levi Jordan Plantation represent the presence of African material goods in southern slave culture and demonstrate the competence and abilities of African American artisans. Some of the carved bone artifacts found at Mont Repose resemble the flywhisk parts found by Brown. The possibility of assigning religious context to these items necessitates a brief examination of African-American religious practices.

White attempts to Christianize slaves seemed noble to the planter class, but these efforts were incredibly ethnocentric and were met by opposition in the slave community in the form of conjurers and tellers of slave folklore. Eventually, slaves adapted Christianity for their own purposes and once again applied resilience and adaptation.<sup>41</sup> Christianity and other religious practices became valuable coping tools for slaves.

They interpreted the Christian God in a different manner than European-Americans. Slaves did not view God as an omniscient being who judged humans and allowed or forbade entrance into a blissful afterlife. To the enslaved, God represented a

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<sup>40</sup> Mcdavid, Carol and Brown, Kenneth. <http://www.webarchaeology.com/html/politica.htm>

<sup>41</sup> Genovese, Eugene. pg. 162

“transcendent being” more parallel to African deities.<sup>42</sup> Religion was presented to slaves by their masters in an attempt to influence them to accept their secular reality and to be content. After all, those who worked the hardest in this world would be rewarded in the next. Planters were successful to an extent, but they could not prevent aspects of traditional African religious practices such as “parallel consciousness”, i.e., hags and haunts, as well as conjuring and “hoodoo” from influencing slave culture.<sup>43</sup>

Accounts of pierced coins, conjuring bags, hags, and malign spirits all give evidence of African religious traditions emerging in South Carolina. Some of these phenomena are also described in relation to the Levi Jordan Plantation. Some artifacts found there are related to West African Yoruba practices.<sup>44</sup> Due to the presence of rice agriculture in South Carolina and West Africa, it is likely that at least part of the slave population at Mont Repose also had West African heritage. It is possible that some slaves from Levi Jordan and Mont Repose shared general West African origins. Evidence of specific African practices has been used to determine the cultural origin of some slaves and their customs. African-American slaves adapted Christian practices and observances to somewhat soften their dire conditions. The thought of a better afterlife certainly assisted slaves in their daily pursuits and challenges. Some sects of African influenced slave religion inconsistent with Christianity such as conjuring and sorcery also helped slaves resist their masters in imperceptible ways. The modified religion of the slaves served as a coping mechanism to ease the burdens which came with a life of bondage.

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<sup>42</sup> Joyner, Charles. pg. 141

<sup>43</sup> Joyner, Charles. pg. 142

<sup>44</sup> Mcdavid, Carol and Brown, Kenneth. <http://www.webarchaeology.com/html/politica.htm>

Cultural retention is an extremely important concept when discussing African-American culture. Some planters believed that African culture would be lost and forgotten along with the many casualties of the Middle Passage. Those who subscribed to that idea vastly underestimated the importance of material and social culture due to the assumption that African culture was inferior to their own. The men and women who survived the Middle Passage retained their memories of Africa and passed them along to successive generations. The retention of African culture may possibly be ascribed to the trauma visited upon Africans during the slave trade and transport process. Any memories of their homes and mundane activities must have provided some degree of comfort as well as lessened the trauma associated with displacement from home and family. These remembrances influenced the way newly enslaved Africans viewed themselves and their new surroundings. Most importantly, these cultural retentions dictated much of the resultant African-American culture and helped slaves cope with and resist the cruelty visited upon them, with both passivity and aggression.

Cultural retention of African traditions is vital to any review of slave culture because it not only influenced art and the way their visual and oral traditions continued, but it also affected the ways in which they pursued everyday accomplishments. This influence extended to tools, clothing, arts and crafts, folklore, work and play methodology, and many other aspects of their material culture. The distinctive characteristics of material culture can also be used to determine the origin of African-American slaves when compared with African traditions. In 1996, Patricia Samford, then a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, published a paper entitled *The Archaeology of African-American Slavery and Material Culture*. In this



paper, Samford offers an insightful examination of material culture. Samford's outlook on the subject is best summarized by the following, "Social structure is produced and reproduced through the arrangement of the material world, which people use to define themselves and others"<sup>45</sup>. Slaves created and refined objects and practices based upon their African heritage and shared experiences in slavery. Enslaved Africans used material culture to define themselves and their captors in new and unfamiliar surroundings.

### **Origins of Bone Button Use**

During our excavations, bone buttons of many sizes and shapes were found within the perimeter of the proposed multi-use/kitchen structure. Several different cultures have used bone buttons and other bone artifacts in varied contexts over many centuries. Pre-historic artisans used animal remains including antler, ivory, and bone to produce functional items such as pins and awls as well as artistic pieces. The Inuit, native to the Pacific Northwest, have used bone as a substitute for preferred materials such as stone or wood when necessary in their material culture. The use and production of bone buttons has been documented at sites dating to the first and fourth centuries in Britain as well.<sup>46</sup> At a Romano-British site near Reading, England, bone discs and scapulae of sheep (which had been perforated in the process of manufacture) were found.

The common thread between these geographically and temporally separated cases may be related to the availability and quantity of bones resultant from food cultivation and preparation. The use of animal bones to produce artifacts would have been useful during shortages of preferred materials. Historically, bone would have been used to

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<sup>45</sup> Samford, Patricia. *The Archaeology of African-American Slavery and Material Culture*. pg. 98

<sup>46</sup> Mercer, Henry C. (1960) *Ancient Carpenter's Tools*.

manufacture buttons when the means to make or acquire metal buttons were unavailable. When coping with material shortages, innovation led to new methods and tools of button production. The methods of preparation and manufacture of bone discs have proven similar in historic contexts, with minor differences associated with occupation and material availability.

There have been studies conducted in the attempt to replicate bone button production. Replication experiments can reveal much about mechanical process. Shannon Glazer, formerly a graduate student at Binghamton State University, conducted button replication trials using pertinent implements, methods, and bone elements discerned through documentary research in her master's thesis. Glazer used domesticated cow (*Bos Taurus*) and domesticated pig (*Sus scrofa*) bones in her experiments. She prepared and worked the bone elements using tools and methods described in other works. This study is important because it describes the material remains left by bone button production. The only flaw with Glazer's experiments is the age of the animals from which she obtained her raw bone elements. Modern methods of slaughter generally dictate a much younger age for killing pigs than historical methods. Slaughtering pigs at a younger age leaves the bones more brittle and more difficult to manipulate. Bones from older pigs are typically harder and more resilient. The tools and methods of preparation applied by Glazer were typical of other studies.

Various studies have cited the use of a carpenter's brace and center bit in the production of bone buttons. A carpenter's brace was used with center bits of various sizes. The center bit is an iron piece with three prongs that is held by the brace. A center bit was discovered by William Louis Calver in the same context as bone buttons, blanks,

and erroneously made buttons at a Revolutionary War barracks site at West Point, New York.<sup>47</sup> These studies also reference lathes as the preferred tool for cutting buttons.<sup>48</sup> In his paper, *Variability in Bone Button Manufacture in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century North America*, Paul M. Matchen describes the lathe as the preferred tool for the manufacture of four and five-hole bone buttons.<sup>49</sup> These types of buttons are frequently found at late eighteenth and early nineteenth century sites but are not present in the artifact collection of Mont Repose. It is also unclear whether the lathe was available to slaves. Due to the size of Mont Repose during the early nineteenth century, it is possible that slaves had the access and skills necessary to use a lathe.

Another tool suggested in the preparation of bone elements for production is the frame saw.<sup>50</sup> Frame saws may have been more readily available to slaves for use in bone button production. In order to produce blanks, the bone must be split to produce flat blanks for better drilling.<sup>51</sup> Walter Klippel and Gerald Schroedl describe this process with the machete as the cutting implement while Elizabeth Hughes and Marion Lester reference saw usage in their study. Each bone element was also prepared using water, vinegar, or sodium carbonate. Chemical preparation was necessary to increase the malleability of bones, which also produced more success during the drilling process. Bone elements were soaked for various amounts of time in different solutions. After attaining a more malleable material, the process would have continued as described in

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<sup>47</sup> Calver, William L. and Reginald P. Bolton. 1950 *History Written with a Pick and Shovel*.

<sup>48</sup> Macgregor 1985; Mercer 1975; Klippel and Schroedl 1999; Hinks 1995

<sup>49</sup> Matchen, Paul M. pg. 3

<sup>50</sup> Glazer, Shannon (2006). *From Soup to Buttons: An Experimental Investigation of Historic Bone Button Manufacture in an Institutional Context*

<sup>51</sup> Hughes, Elizabeth, and Marion Lester.  
1991 *The Big Book of Buttons*.

their study. All of these methods are described in detail in these studies and are representative of the manipulation necessary to produce bone buttons by hand.

Unfortunately, there has been no evidence for bone button manufacture at Mont Repose. The detritus and tools associated with bone button production are very distinct and have not appeared in our excavations thus far. It is important, however, to discuss the methods, tools, and evidence associated with bone button production. The occupants of Mont Repose stayed there past the pinnacle of rice production and slave presence. It is likely that tools used for many purposes including bone item manufacture would have been sold, eliminating them from the archeological record. It is still possible however, that waste from bone button production exists at our site. Evidence supporting the theory of a bone button cottage industry at Mont Repose may be uncovered with future excavations.

### **Origins of Bone Toothbrush Use**

At least two bone toothbrushes were uncovered in the multi-use/kitchen building. One fragment measures approximately eight and a half centimeters from the head to the partial handle and approximately one centimeter at its widest part, at the top of the partial handle. Bristle toothbrushes were in use in China during the seventeenth century. These were constructed of Siberian Hog hair and bamboo or wood.<sup>52</sup> The toothbrushes excavated at Mont Repose seem similar to a type described in many accounts of toothbrush history. While imprisoned for inciting a riot, an Englishman named William Addis conceived and constructed the first bristle toothbrush suitable for

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<sup>52</sup> The History of Toothpaste, Toothbrush, and Floss.  
[http://www.toothbrushexpress.com/html/toothbrush\\_history.html](http://www.toothbrushexpress.com/html/toothbrush_history.html)

mass production in 1780. Addis used the hair from the tail of a cow as his bristles and a thigh bone from the same animal as his handle.<sup>53</sup> After his release, Addis began producing his bone-handled toothbrush and became wealthy due to his invention. His descendants also produced his toothbrush, which saw wide usage in many countries by the early 1800's. Addis chose the materials for his toothbrush due to the resilience displayed by the bone during the drilling and hair attachment process as well as its strength when exposed to moisture<sup>54</sup>. The bristles were passed through holes bored into the head of the bone handle and secured using either liquid adhesive or wire, depending upon the account.<sup>55</sup> It seems that the brushes found at Mont Repose display a green patina in the head region where the bristles were attached. This type of green coloring is commonly associated with copper oxidation. This evidence seems to support the notion that bristles were attached using copper wire. These items seem out of place considering the proposed work-related context they were found in. It is possible that these bone artifacts were found amongst other bone artifacts associated with clothing production and repair because they needed to be refurbished. Though there is no direct evidence of this, it is also possible that the toothbrushes found in the multi-use building were adapted for other uses by slaves.

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<sup>53</sup> Of Finite-Element Analysis and A Winning Smile  
Evolution and Analysis of the Toothbrush. Kyle Sembera, a mechanical engineering senior at Lamar University, Beaumont, Tex., as a final assignment for an elective design class

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<sup>55</sup> The History of Toothpaste, Toothbrush, and Floss.  
[http://www.toothbrushexpress.com/html/toothbrush\\_history.html](http://www.toothbrushexpress.com/html/toothbrush_history.html)

### **Origins of Bone Lice Comb Use**

The multi-use/kitchen structure at Mont Repose has also yielded fragments of at least two carved bone lice combs. The smaller fragment measures two centimeters by one centimeter, with teeth protruding from two sides along the two centimeter plane. A larger, almost complete lice comb was found during the 2008 Summer Field Session. This larger fragment measures approximately eleven and one half centimeters long by approximately four and one half centimeters measured parallel with the extremely fine teeth. Each fragment is only a few millimeters wide, as combs usually are. Before the invention and widespread use of pesticides and preventative treatments, humans were plagued by parasites and other pests. Lice were common and created a severe annoyance for any person unfortunate enough to be a host for them. Bone lice combs have been found in many different sites spanning centuries. They have been uncovered from prehistoric sites and historic sites. Bone lice combs have been discovered at North American sites, European sites, West and East Asian contexts, and in Africa.

Some combs were made of different materials, but most display a fine-toothed feature effective in removing and killing lice from the scalp and hair. Carved parasite combs have been made of many materials including wood, ivory, and bone. Bone combs seem to have become common during the eighteenth century and saw widespread use according to the descriptions of many archeological records including Mount Vernon. This item does not seem as foreign in a work related environment as a toothbrush when their common context is considered. A lice comb would likely have been a personal item carried by many people at all times to combat the presence of discomforting parasites.

When broken, a bone lice comb may have been deposited with other daily garbage. Lice combs are simple items that may have been easy to produce. There is little research available regarding lice combs and historical production methods. It seems possible that slaves would have been capable of producing these items considering the scourge of parasites and the delicate teeth of the lice comb, which were often broken. They would also have had the motivation to replace or repair broken combs. Whether the lice comb remains found at Mont Repose were produced or acquired by slaves, they give account of the daily activities and lives of slaves.

### **Origins of Hand Fan use**

Two fragments have been found which are consistent with hand fan sticks. The sticks of the hand fan are the parts in the middle, between the outer sticks or guard sticks. They form the frame that supports the fabric of the fan and allows it to fold together in an orderly fashion. The hand fan stick fragments are identical in form. The larger fragment measures approximately five centimeters long by approximately one centimeter wide at the widest part. The smaller piece measures approximately four centimeters long with the same width of one centimeter wide. Hand fans have a long history of use. The folding hand fan most likely originated in East Asia, possibly Japan, in the seventeenth century. Fans were made of many materials including ivory, bone, and mica. After international trade routes were established between Asia and Europe, Europeans gained access to hand fans, along with many other goods. Hand fans were first popularized among the elite classes of Italy and subsequently spread throughout Europe. They quickly became popular and were widely used by elite men and women in many

European countries by the beginning of the eighteenth century. Wealthy French and English ladies carried hand fans as fashion accessories and symbols of status. Men used smaller and less ornate hand fans. Hand fans carried by elite women were often adorned with commissioned artwork. Colonial American women undoubtedly also carried hand fans since American fashion and lifestyle was heavily influenced by European trends.

The use of hand fans was extended to most social classes after the invention of lithography by Aloys Senefelder in 1798. The process of lithography allowed fan makers to print scenes on fans, which made them more attractive, yet less expensive. Quicker, more efficient production methods and decreased cost of production made hand fans more accessible to the growing middle class as well. People commonly gave handfans as gifts to women to mark special occasions.

If the flat, tear drop shaped bone artifacts found at Mont Repose are fan parts, it is possible that a fan belonging to one of the white inhabitants came into the possession of a slave. A broken object could have been given to an African-American individual or simply taken from a trash dump. This pattern has been documented in many archeological records of slave owned ceramics. Broken fan parts may have been cast aside after being replaced during the repair of a hand fan by an enslaved individual. It is also possible that a bone fan was purchased by a slave with money earned during off time activities or by exchange. The off time available to slaves laboring under the task system allowed them the time and relative freedom to produce goods with which they could participate in local, inter-plantation, and underground urban markets. The presence of the hand fan parts in a slave dominated structure offers many interesting scenarios for consideration.



If the hand fan which produced these pieces belonged to an individual from the planter's family, the course it may have followed to arrive in a slave's hands would illustrate much about African-American/planter relationships. Planters often gave gifts to their slaves to satisfy their paternalist whims. Gifting reinforced a planter's position above his slaves as well as retained their favor to an extent.<sup>56</sup> Slaves also sought cast off items from their white owners perhaps simply because they preferred colorful and fanciful dress. African-American slaves also exhibited acumen for skilled work, including the production and repair of small, sometimes superfluous items. Many scholars have described these phenomena including Genovese, Joyner, Berlin, and the Whites among others. The observances of many give credence to the notion that slaves could have come into ownership of items usually reserved for the middle-class and the elite. Any of the traditions discussed previously could explain the occurrence of a hand fan or hand fan parts in a slave dominated building. It seems unlikely that an enslaved person or persons would have had the motivation or time to produce hand fans. By the nineteenth century, hand fans were mass produced and would likely have been easier for slaves to acquire than produce. These hand fan related artifacts are unique in our archaeological assemblage because they are not necessary or simple items like buttons, toothbrushes, or lice combs.

### **Comparative Studies**

In institutional contexts, historically those held under bond seem to have at least attempted to change their situation for the better and acquire skills vital for coping and surviving. There are many references regarding bone button use and manufacture which pertain to institutional contexts. Bone button production was common at prison

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<sup>56</sup> Genovese, Eugene. Pg. 575

complexes and to a lesser extent at military installations. While bone buttons were most likely produced at these sites for similar reasons, the conditions at these sites would have varied, possibly influencing many facets of necessity such as material availability and free time for production. While slavery and the plantation fall into this category, the living conditions associated with slave life differed from other institutional situations. Living conditions at an eighteenth and nineteenth century rice plantation (Mont Repose), a British fort on a Caribbean island (Brimstone Hill), and a government prison in New Orleans (the Cabildo prison) differ due to many variables including climate, material accessibility, degree of freedom, provisional concerns, and trade demands to name a few. These concerns may have been influential and created specific variance between antebellum plantation sites and other institutional contexts. A common institutional categorization, however, allows comparison between these sites.<sup>57</sup>

### **Levi Jordan Plantation, Brazoria County, Texas**

At the Levi Jordan plantation in Brazoria County, Texas, Kenneth Brown and his team excavated numerous slave buildings with different designations determined by the occupant's vocation or status. Robert Harris, a former graduate student at the University of Houston, described the artifacts found in the "Bone Carver's Cabin" and the "Curer's Cabin" in a paper presented in 1998.<sup>58</sup> Their excavations yielded shell and bone artifacts which an individual carved or modified.<sup>59</sup> At Mont Repose, excavations have yielded two small fragments of carved bone which display threading. Our artifacts resemble a flywhisk found at the Levi Jordan Plantation. This object was an intricately carved symbol held by elite members of Yoruba society. In the context of the Levi Jordan

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<sup>57</sup> Fogel, Robert William. pg. 172

<sup>58</sup> Harris, Robert N. 1998. Shell Carving and Self-Reliance in an African American Plantation Community.

<sup>59</sup> Harris, Robert N. 1998. Shell Carving and Self-Reliance in an African American Plantation Community.

Plantation, this item seems to have belonged to a healer, a man whom attained status through his practice. The presence of a flywhisk fragment at Mont Repose would demonstrate the ability of a bone carver to produce items of functional or cultural importance. This is an uncommon attribute that may have given this type of artisan increased status and earning potential as evidenced at the Levi Jordan Plantation in Texas. It seems likely that Africans from a Yoruba influenced culture may have been present at Mont Repose considering the origin of many slaves in South Carolina. Future research should confirm or dispel this possibility. Though concrete evidence identifying this small artifact as a flywhisk fragment does not currently exist, it is important to discuss this possibility considering the social and cultural impact associated with the presence of such an item.

### **The Cabildo Government Building, New Orleans**

This small fragment of undetermined origin may also originate from a turned, polished bone needle case as described by Hangar in a site report from the Cabildo government building which dates to the eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries.<sup>60</sup> This bone artifact also resembles contemporary and antique needle cases fashioned in the same style. During excavations at the prison inside the Cabildo in New Orleans, a possible needle case fragment was found in the same context as hand manufactured bone buttons, blanks from which buttons were carved, and a brass straight pin. This is similar to what has been observed at Mont Repose in the proposed multi-use building excepting the presence of bone blanks. Excavations at Mont Repose have also yielded brass straight pins, bone buttons, the possible needle case fragment as well as other sewing or

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<sup>60</sup> Hangar, Kimberly S.1996. *Medley of Cultures: Louisiana History at the Cabildo*.

clothing production related materials all in the same context. The archeological context of these items strongly suggests that the bone artifacts in question may have been part of one or more needle cases. These artifacts and more were also found at Brunswick Town, in North Carolina, during the ten year project which took place from 1958 until 1968.

### **Brunswick Town, North Carolina**

Brunswick Town was a British colonial settlement in North Carolina. During excavations, Stanley South and his crews uncovered many buildings and specific refuse disposal patterns, which contributed to his concept of a “Brunswick Pattern of Refuse Disposal”.<sup>61</sup> To establish his theories regarding midden location in British-American sites, South drew from the excavations of The Hepburn-Reonalds House, Nath Moore’s Front, and the Public House-Tailor Shop. The Public House-Tailor Shop is important to this study because it illustrates the assemblage of artifacts that must be present in an archeological record before sewing related activities can be considered to have been present. Within this structure at Brunswick Town, the artifact assemblage included “scissors, hooks and eyes, baling seals, thimbles, buttons, buckles, pins, and beads”.<sup>62</sup> All of these artifacts are present in the archeological record pertaining to the structure with which this study is concerned at Mont Repose except scissors and baling seals. Due to this comparative reference, it seems certain that sewing activities were being conducted in this multi-use building at Mont Repose. Although the workers in the Public House-Tailor Shop were reported as mostly European, the demography and general labor dominance of African-American slaves in South Carolina indicate a different scenario for

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<sup>61</sup> South. (1959). pg. 47

<sup>62</sup> South. (1959). pg. 50

the proposed multi-use building at Mont Repose; those conducting sewing activities were likely African-American slaves.

### **Brimstone Hill Fortification, St. Kitts, British Virgin Islands**

Brimstone Hill is a British fortification located on the island of St. Kitts in the British Virgin Islands. The fortification built atop the hill was constructed and renovated from 1690 until being abandoned in 1853. The construction activities were carried out primarily by slaves owned by the British army. These slaves were allowed the usage of four buildings including hospitals, a kitchen, and a “craftsman’s” building. Walter E. Klippel and Gerald F. Schroedl, of the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, have conducted excavations to find and designate the identity of these buildings. During the 1996 and 1997 field sessions, faunal assemblages included some sixteen percent modified bone. These worked remains resulted from bone button manufacture. The bone buttons made at Brimstone Hill were likely used as cores around which cloth is used as a covering.

Bone cores made at Brimstone Hill were crafted using tabular bones such as ribs from cattle and the sea turtle carapace. Cattle ribs were chopped into sections and then split. The outer cortical layers were separated from the inner cancellous, or spongy, bone by driving a metal chopping implement between them. Sea turtle ribs were modified by cutting the deep portion of the bone out instead of splitting the exterior and interior surfaces. The resulting “rectangular segments” were then drilled from either side with a hand held carpenter’s brace and a “button bit”. The discs were extracted in this manner. Manipulation of faunal remains for button manufacture renders the raw material in specific ways. Specific cut marks result from preparation techniques. Extraction of bone

discs from prepared bone sections is a hand crafted method and results in much error and waste. Often, sections of prepared bone are found with button fragments still attached and many broken and unfinished button cores exist in faunal assemblages associated with bone button core manufacture. If any of the tools or detritus associated with the techniques of bone button production were found at Mont Repose, it would be logical to assume that African-Americans were producing buttons to serve necessity or for trade purposes. Future excavations may reveal more and offer a definitive answer regarding the possible existence of a bone button industry at Mont Repose.

## Chapter 3

### Mont Repose

The excavations at Mont Repose conducted by Dr. Sue Mullins Moore, Professor of Anthropology and Archeology at Georgia Southern University and her students and volunteers have yielded many interesting artifacts. Though there are no existing structures, pictures, or other documentary evidence to indicate the original layout of the buildings, at least part of one structure has been found. This structure appears to be an outbuilding with a multi-use occupation. Similar buildings at other sites generally have been documented as slave dominated and used for many things including food preparation, sewing and textile production, storage, etc. These types of buildings in which slaves conducted many activities were isolated from the main house to create a more suitable separation between “those who served and those who were served”.<sup>63</sup> Former slaves worked the plantations of the south and were largely responsible for the prosperity of their owners. This was one reason for their fierce attachment to their homes and workspaces.

Slave housing in the Deep South had an important impact upon many aspects of slave life. In “The Archeology of African-American Slavery and Material Culture”, Patricia Samford describes the impact of bondage upon the lives of early African-Americans. Slave quarters were small and often housed more than one family. This

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<sup>63</sup> Vlach, John Micheal. (1993). *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*. Pg. 43.

intimate spatial orientation suited an African ideal for close and prolonged interaction.<sup>64</sup> The location and layout of quarters was often determined by the labor system employed as well as the type and number of laborers present. Slaveholders were also responsible for the location of slave communities and their suggestion was often to the benefit of their own convenience.<sup>65</sup> Slaveholders could not always control every aspect of usage in their plantation structures, however.

The mention of root cellars found underneath quarters reveals the importance of material culture in non-violent slave resistance.<sup>66</sup> Root cellars were a convenient way to hide items important to slave economy, status, and psychology. Root cellars were also used to store items of significant cultural importance. In *Coerced and Free Migration: Global Perspectives*, David Elstis describes one instance of this:

On the same plantation where non-European burials were found, artifacts linked to Ibo spiritual tradition have also been discovered in a root cellar into which libations of wine or brandy... had been poured... spoon handles tentatively identified as inscribed with symbols used by Ibo diviners found at an adjoining quarter lend further credence to notion that Africans in this neighborhood managed to re-create spiritual rituals associated with their particular African heritage.<sup>67</sup>

Planters, of course, sought to restrict the use of root cellars because they saw them for what they were: a form of passive resistance as well as direct evidence for culture

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<sup>64</sup> Vlach, John Michael. (1990). *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts*. pg. 123

<sup>65</sup> Samford, Patricia. *The Archaeology of African-American Slavery and Material Culture*. pg.92

<sup>66</sup> Samford, Patricia. *The Archaeology of African-American Slavery and Material Culture*. pg. 92

<sup>67</sup> Elstis, David (2002). *Coerced and Free Migration: Global Perspectives*. pg. 145



retention. Given the restrictions and retaliation which followed the Stono Rebellion and Nat Turner's slave insurrection, African-American slaves would have likely found less obvious ways to resist their patriarchal white owners, such as root cellars. Root cellars are an important example of what patterns found in architecture and behavior tell us about white and black residents of the South. It is possible that a sub-floor pit may have been present underneath the proposed multi-use building that has been the focus of excavations at Mont Repose.

### **The Gillison family**

Derry Gillison was born in Barwick, Massachusetts on June 10, 1743. He married Elizabeth Bethson on January 8, 1770. There is documentary evidence of Derry Pittman Gillison's presence in South Carolina as early as 1769. He witnessed many property deeds during his time in the state. Derry was recorded as a witness to a deed conferred in 1769 in Granville County and later in the execution of the last will and testament of John Sealy, also of Granville County in 1771.<sup>68</sup> He was also mentioned as being present during the drafting of Hezekiah Rose's deed, written on September 22, 1775.<sup>69</sup> The details of the deed include a description of the location of Hezekiah Rose's new holding: "500 acres in Granville County on water of Coosawhatchie and Beaver Dam Branch bounded on the North by Derry Gillison".<sup>70</sup> This account describes the possibility of Derry owning land in the vicinity but does not reveal the exact location. During the Revolutionary War, Derry Gillison served as an express rider. He relayed messages between Charleston and Savannah for twenty-seven days during October of 1779.<sup>71</sup> The

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<sup>68</sup> South Carolina Magazine of Ancestral Research Index. pg. 201

<sup>69</sup> South Carolina Memorials: Abstracts of Land Titles. pg. 41

<sup>70</sup> South Carolina Memorials: Abstracts of Land Titles. pg. 41

<sup>71</sup> Roster of South Carolina Patriots in the American Revolution. pg. 360

first census conducted by the United States in 1790 recorded Derry Gillison as a resident of the Beaufort District with holdings including 39 slaves.<sup>72</sup> These accounts confirm Derry Gillison's presence in Beaufort District as early as 1769 and offer the possibility that he owned Mont Repose. It seems likely that Mont Repose was inhabited prior to 1800 based upon artifactual data. Ceramic types and a coin dated 1739 indicate occupation during the late eighteenth century. It is unclear who owned the lands associated with Mont Repose prior to 1825. None of the records mentioning Derry Gillison confirm his ownership of Mont Repose but they do describe his status as a property owner in the area. It is also possible that Thomas Charles Gillison, Derry's son, owned the land in question.

Thomas Charles Gillison was born to Derry and his wife, Elizabeth, on February 27, 1772. There are many accounts of Thomas owning slaves and property in St. Luke's Parish as well as Prince William Parish.<sup>73</sup> He also owned Cotton Hall, a plantation to the north of Mont Repose, across the Coosawhatchie River. Thomas Charles Gillison died on June 4, 1825. According to his will, Samuel R. Gillison received property from Thomas' estate. This property is referred to as "formerly belonging to the estate of Lambright".<sup>74</sup> William and Jane Lambright owned a rice plantation on the Coosawhatchie River during the 1770s.<sup>75</sup> The property referred to as "Lambright" in Thomas' will is described in deeds as the same property as Mont Repose or located nearby. The possibility of Thomas Charles owning Mont Repose prior to 1825 should be considered in light of this information.

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<sup>72</sup> 1790 Census of the United States

<sup>73</sup> SCAH

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Charles Gillison's Last Will and Testament

<sup>75</sup> The Slaves of George and Dorcas Shuler. pg. 2

Though it cannot be proven beyond doubt that Samuel R. Gillison received Mont Repose from Thomas Charles' estate, Samuel R. was well-established at Mont Repose by 1845 at the latest. Samuel R. had served as an ensign in the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment (Youngblood's) of the South Carolina Militia during the War of 1812.<sup>76</sup> Samuel was recorded in financial transactions as well as the 1820, 1830, and 1840 censuses. Proof of Samuel's ownership of Mont Repose comes in 1845 from the marriage advertisement for his daughter, Adele.

Married at Mont Repose, St. Luke's Parish, on the 13<sup>th</sup> Inst., by the Rev. Mr. Reid, Col. Isadore Lartique of St. Peter's, to Miss Adela G., the eldest daughter of Samuel R. Gillison Esq<sup>77</sup>

When Samuel died in 1847, he left Mont Repose to his daughter, Sarah Rebecca Gillison.<sup>78</sup> In 1849, Sarah married James Joseph Butler. After this time, it is likely that the couple began living at Mont Repose. Their child Eliza Gillison Butler is thought to have been buried at Mont Repose, possibly within the same burial plot requested by Samuel R. Gillison in his will. Eliza Gillison Butler was born after 1850 and likely died before 1863.

The number of slaves present at Mont Repose saw its peak in 1840 at two-hundred and twenty-three men, women, and children.<sup>79</sup> If a reasonable number of individuals occupying a single living space were three to four, a minimum of fifty-five dwellings would have been necessary to shelter a workforce that large during that time.

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<sup>76</sup> Ancestry.com. War of 1812 Service Records

<sup>77</sup> Columbia Newspapers: The South Carolinian. Issue of March 20, 1845

<sup>78</sup> Samuel R. Gillison's Last Will and Testament; from the Sarah R. Walker Papers. 246.02.01(E)-01

<sup>79</sup> 1840 Census data

That number would be half if the slave quarters at Mont Repose housed two families at once. In any case, a relatively large slave quarter must have been present at Mont Repose, in somewhat close proximity to the center of rice cultivation. Future excavations as well as further analysis of our findings should reveal their location relative to the “big house”.

The mean ceramic date associated with the multi-use/kitchen structure, and the artifacts uncovered within, occurs during a moderately populated time at Mont Repose. Due to excavation, classification, and analysis of ceramic artifacts, a mean ceramic date for our site can be tentatively set around 1802. The 1790 Census reports the presence of seven European-American residents at Mont Repose along with thirty-nine African American slaves<sup>80</sup>. A decade later Derry Gillison owned one hundred and fourteen slaves. The absence of one white resident could be attributed to the establishment of Cotton Hall, a plantation begun by Thomas Charles Gillison, Derry’s son. In 1800, Thomas Charles Gillison owned forty-five slaves presumably at Cotton Hall.<sup>81</sup> Between the years 1800 and 1810, the slave holdings of the Gillison family ballooned to a combined number of two-hundred and seventy-one slaves.<sup>82</sup> The plantations owned by the Gillisons are located in the former St. Lukes and Prince William Parishes and may have included Mont Repose and Cotton Hall. In 1810, Derry Gillison had one-hundred and thirty-six slaves possibly working and living at Mont Repose. At Cotton Hall, two Gillison men held property and slaves by 1810. Thomas Charles owned ninety-four slaves while David Gillison (also Derry’s son) owned thirty slaves.<sup>83</sup> This explosion in

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<sup>80</sup> 1790 Census data

<sup>81</sup> 1800 Census data

<sup>82</sup> 1810 Census data

<sup>83</sup> 1810 Census data

African-American slave population at the Gillison Family plantations is a testament to the combined power of human effort and the outstanding potential of rice as a staple crop. The 1820 Census data is inconclusive regarding the number of slaves held by the Gillison family. In the 1830 Census, however, Samuel Gillison counted one hundred and twenty-six slaves and Thomas Gillison owned sixty-nine slaves in Prince William Parish. Samuel also owned sixty-five slaves in St. Lukes Parish.<sup>84</sup> In 1840, Samuel held two hundred and twenty-three slaves while Thomas kept one hundred and three slaves, both in St. Lukes Parish.<sup>85</sup> The populations at these plantations as recorded by the Censuses of 1790, 1800, 1810, 1830, and 1840 contribute valuable perspective pertaining to the ratio of white and black residents as well as the relative material necessity, as related to the bone artifacts found thus far.

Derry Gillison's arrival in St. Luke's Parrish and the establishment of many plantations in lowcountry South Carolina coincided with the universal adoption of tidal cultivation as the preferred method of rice production. The fortunes of the Gillison family paralleled the historic ascent and decline of rice agriculture and the slave trade. White and black populations at Mont Repose seem to have fluctuated with the falloff of the rice market and the loss of slaves associated with the Revolutionary War period. As more slaves came back into South Carolina and rice profits rose, the Gillison family expanded its real estate and slave holdings.

North of the bluff, along the Coosawhatchie River, there is evidence of a network of canals and gates which would have been used to flood and drain the rice fields during cultivation. This system relied upon the Coosawhatchie River as its source of water. It is

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<sup>84</sup> 1830 Census data

<sup>85</sup> 1840 Census data

likely that slaves taken from the rice-dependent Western coast of the continent brought the ideas and mechanisms which made rice cultivation possible at Mont Repose. This elaborate water management system is another example of the influence African-American slaves had on the landscape of Mont Repose and other rice plantations.

The Coosawhatchie River originates in Allendale County, South Carolina. It meanders east to the Broad River. The Broad River then flows into Port Royal Sound and then to the Atlantic Ocean. The many creeks which connect to the Coosawhatchie River allowed access to Beaufort, which is located on Port Royal Sound, as well as the many plantations located in this extremely prosperous and rice dependent region. The complex networks of waterways which innervated Southern states were navigated by the African-American boatmen responsible for the transport of goods and persons to and from plantations.<sup>86</sup> The knowledge held by these boatmen undoubtedly gave them elevated position and access to external social and trade resources. Though it seems likely that enslaved men familiar with boat use, river navigation, and perhaps boat production were present at Mont Repose, there has been no evidence of these men or of boating activities found at Mont Repose. Future excavations could possibly yield such findings given the location of this plantation and the requirements of rice cultivation and crop transport. There is an area to the northeast of the bluff at Mont Repose that could conceivably have served as a boat slip for loading and unloading goods for transport and launching vessels for river travel.

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<sup>86</sup> Joyner, Charles. *Down by the Riverside* (1984). pg. 76

## **Archeology at Mont Repose**

Beginning during the February of the 2000 Spring Field Session, the first unit of a unit block, which would eventually contain fourteen, was opened. This unit, N808 E800, proved to be a valuable and extensive source for artifacts of many kinds. The adjoining unit to the west, N808 E802, yielded many artifacts as well as the unit to the North, N810 E800. The block was expanded to fourteen two meter square units, in an attempt to discover the parameters of a proposed multi-use structure. Some of the Mont Repose-associated bone artifacts described in this paper were uncovered during an attempt to lower the floor of N808 E802. A substantial chimney fall as well as an intact bucksaw hindered this effort, however. This same chimney scatter continued into N808 E800 as well and occupied the same context as the hand fan sticks and other bone artifacts. These artifacts originated from Level 3 Zone D of N808 E800. However, the brick scatter associated with the chimney fall was fully excavated in this unit, yet ran deeper in N808 E802. The bone artifacts taken from N808 E802 came entirely from the same level and zone: Level 2 Zone D. Through the excavation of the chimney brick and saw, neither the level nor zone changed for this unit. This suggests fill of some type considering the adjacent units experienced as much as a level change in some cases. The possibility of fill in this area is interesting considering the existence of root cellars in the archeological records of many other studies. The lack of stratigraphic change in this unit cannot be completely explained until the entire floor of the unit is brought to the same level. Future excavations will clarify the nature of these archeological features.

During the 2008 Summer Field Session, walls enclosing a possible cemetery were discovered and partially excavated west of the existing trailer and garage. The

designation of cemetery is consistent with the will of Samuel R. Gillison, in which he specified his wishes to be buried within a family burial ground.<sup>87</sup> A grid system was set based upon the results of our many survey and posthole test excavations. An excavation plan used to determine the hypothetical position of the main house/outbuilding complex typically associated with colonial and antebellum plantations was designed according to the results of historical document research, archeological survey, and test excavations. Unfortunately, some historical context was disturbed or completely destroyed by heavy equipment operators associated with agricultural pursuit and pond construction. After being repeatedly plowed over many years, the bluff area and many other sites have been compromised to varying degrees. Documentary research has also proven difficult due to missing resources attributed to Sherman's March and other, more natural occurrences. The lack of historical evidence has contributed many questions as well as answers regarding Mont Repose.

Mont Repose was a prosperous rice plantation established by the Gillison Family at least as early as 1825 according to archival findings. It is likely that this plantation represented colonial and antebellum life in the South similar to the many plantations nearby. These plantations included Davant, Spring Hill (at one time owned by the Gillisons and later the Hugerins), Gregorie Neck, Mackay's Point, Pleasant Hill, and Cotton Hall directly to the North, among others. All of these plantations were at least established during the Gillisons tenure at Mont Repose and this list does not contain the names of many other plantations nearby. Historically, Mont Repose was located in Granville County, St. Luke's Parish, and Beaufort County, parts of which are now Jasper County. Mont Repose reached its peak during the decade between 1830 and 1840.

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<sup>87</sup> Samuel R. Gillison's Last Will and Testament; from the Sarah R. Walker Papers. 246.02.01(E)-01



After the death of Samuel R. Gillison, the plantation was left to his daughter Sarah Rebecca Gillison and facilitated by his wife, Eliza. It seems that the Gillisons then left Mont Repose abandoned and moved from the area in 1863. Though it is known that the plantation remained part of the Gillison family holdings, it is unclear what became of all of their slaves. It is possible that the slaves responsible for rice cultivation at Mont Repose were sold to neighboring plantations or at market in Beaufort or Charleston. It is possible that the plantation buildings were burned by Sherman and his Federal soldiers during his infamous March to the Sea. It is known that Sherman and his men passed through Gillisonville, which is located near Mont Repose. After the Civil War, the plantation and the Gillison Family were torn asunder, resulting in an incomplete account of many family members' whereabouts. After slavery was abolished, it became impossible for rice cultivation to continue on such a large scale. The planters had neither the manpower nor knowledge to reap their crops without African-American hands and minds. Some freed persons stayed on their plantations because they knew the land and could not face the uncertainty of relocation. Cotton would soon become the dominant crop in the South until the boll weevil came in the early twentieth century. There was also a hurricane which affected the area in the late eighteenth century. One or all of these occurrences could explain the lack of historical structures at Mont Repose. It is also possible that they were razed by Mont Repose's owners during the postbellum years of occupancy after Lula Ford Butler, Samuel R. Gillison's granddaughter, sold the plantation in 1879.

## Chapter 4

### Excavation and description of bone artifacts at Mont Repose

Stanley South's button typology was extremely useful when determining the type of buttons found at Mont Repose and the corresponding time periods during which they were in use. South developed his typology through research he conducted at the Brunswick Town site. This typology, which is vital to button seriation, describes 32 different types of buttons, classified by material, shape, number of holes, method of production, and method of attachment. Every bone button found at Mont Repose can be classified as Type 15, according to South's index. There is one button made possibly of shell, classified as Type 22. Thus far, the most common size bone button is approximately twelve to thirteen millimeters. Twenty-two bone buttons of this size and classified as Type 15 appear in our assemblage. The second most common size of Type 15 bone button is approximately eighteen millimeters in diameter. Efforts at Mont Repose have produced eight of these. The third most common Type 15 bone button, of which six were present in our excavations, measures ten millimeters in diameter. The fourth most common size is quite large at twenty-four millimeters in diameter. Four of these bone buttons were found, while the somewhat smaller fifteen millimeter bone button has been found once. These discs are very simple, smooth, and unadorned. They exhibit manufacturing marks consistent with the production method described in Paul M. Matchen's presentation on bone button manufacture. Based upon his paper as well as measurements and observations made of our artifacts, the following paragraph is a description of how the bone buttons from Mont Repose were likely made.

According to Paul Matchen in his description of bone button manufacture, after the long bone elements necessary for button production were split, button blanks were drilled from the resulting slabs. A hand-held brace with a center, or button, bit attached to the end was used to drill one side of the bone slab. The slab was then flipped to the opposite side, after which the button bit was turned in the same manner. The outer prongs of the bit, which were shorter than the center prong, cut through the slab, producing a disc and leaving distinctive marks on one or both sides of the new button blank. These Type 15 bone button discs were commonly used as cores over which cloth or metal were fastened<sup>88</sup>. Because of this, Matchen asserts that the center hole is likely a by-product of manufacture<sup>89</sup>.

Considering the archaeological evidence and the isolation of lowcountry South Carolina, it is most likely that the bone buttons found at Mont Repose Plantation were produced in this manner. It would have been unlikely that any degree of automation as advanced as a lathe or button machine would have been present to satisfy the needs of the population during the early nineteenth century at Mont Repose. It is possible that more advanced means of button production existed in Beaufort or Charleston, but no type of button consistent with those methods of preparation have been recovered at Mont Repose.

It is important to consider the aesthetic and practical appearance of the objects discussed in this paper. Each of the artifacts discovered at Mont Repose in our block of units located underneath a black gum tree, northeast of the existing trailer, has been

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<sup>88</sup> Hinks, Stephen. *A Structural and Functional Analysis of Eighteenth Century Buttons* (Accessed through Paul M. Matchen's *Variability in Bone Button Manufacture in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century North America*).

<sup>89</sup> Matchen, Paul M. pg. 3

identified with varying degrees of certainty. The needle case/flywhisk fragments display similarities to both artifacts yet fit into different material culture classifications. A needle case is a practical item which fits in with the other sewing related items found nearby and could have been purchased in many markets. A flywhisk has greater social implications for class and hierarchy among African-Americans, as archaeological findings at the Levi Jordan Plantation in Brazoria County, Texas indicate. A flywhisk would likely have been made by African-American hands to be used by a person of elevated social status. It seems unlikely that an item of this nature would be found in legitimate rural or urban marketplaces. Due to the social importance of status related items, the designation of flywhisk for the artifacts in question should remain in consideration. The bone button blanks, hand fan sticks, toothbrushes, and lice comb fragments correspond with heavily researched comparative items of their respective kinds. These items are all representative of traditionally European items and display little or no variation from usual forms. The lack of modification or stylistic improvisation suggests that these objects were not owned by African-Americans or were not important enough or cherished by them as personal items.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusions**

This study regarding the identification and seriation of buttons and bone artifacts has been conducted to assist with the categorization of future finds and to build upon previous scholarship. The majority of buttons found at Mont Repose can be categorized as # 15 using Stanley South's method.

Shannon Glazer's work helps illustrate the implements, bone elements, and methods associated with historical bone button manufacture. Her replication experiments detail success and failure rates as they pertain to species and anatomical origin of bones. Conducting procedures concerning the chemical content of faunal remains could help determine the degree of preparation necessary for bone artifact manufacture. Her project also illuminates the complexity associated with the process of bone button manufacture and the different methods and requirements of animal harvest.

Walter Klippel and Gerald Schroedl's work at Brimstone Hill has revealed the specifics of bone button production in an historical context. A specific type of debris is associated with bone button manufacture. Faunal remains subjected to the process of button manufacture display distinctive marks and damage. There has been no evidence of the specific debris found in the same context as Mont Repose's bone artifacts. While numerous tools have been recovered at Mont Repose, none specifically cited as being used in bone button production have been found. Therefore, it is likely that bone button cores were acquired through trade and subsequently covered with cloth. Other areas yet

to be examined could yield physical evidence of bone button manufacture, given the ongoing excavations at Mont Repose. Though many activities occurred in the multi-use structure already described by our archeological record, they were likely associated with small-scale household maintenance such as cooking, sewing, and clothing repair. Bone button manufacture on any scale would have required more space than would have been available in this structure.

The volume of sewing related items found in the same context as our bone cores supports the idea of further bone button core manipulation. Further analysis of Stanley South's excavations at Brunswick Town clarifies the context of the sewing goods found at Mont Repose. The artifacts were excavated from a structure which seems to have seen much domestic use. The building in question, possibly a slave dominated structure, existed from as early as 1780 and was abandoned or destroyed as late as 1830. A coin dated 1731 indicates that the building in question was used during the late eighteenth century. According to Dr. Sue Mullins Moore, the heirlooming of coins did exist, but it is unlikely that the process of passing this coin on would have extended into the nineteenth century. The literature reviewed in this paper emphasizes which artifacts and contexts associated with bone button manufacture should be sought during the study of our collections and future excavation.

Many of these artifacts found at Mont Repose suggest the presence of bone button production, as well as clothing production and repair among other activities. The possibility of a cottage industry for bone artifact production at Mont Repose is explored due to the far reaching and much encompassing influence of such an industry upon the social and economic worlds of slaves at Mont Repose. Slaves could have produced bone

artifacts at Mont Repose to satisfy provision shortages. The manufacture and repair of clothing is examined in many prominent scholarly works written about African-American slaves.<sup>90</sup> Black plantation residents were also active in many forms of trade. Bone artifacts might have found their way to other plantations, rural towns, and cities through the trade networks in which slaves participated.

Analysis of the intense interaction between European and African-American southerners and the ways in which their mingled lives shaped southern culture and architecture is vital when considering the identification of buildings at plantation sites. In *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*, published in 1993, John Michael Vlach describes the manner by which slaves initiated and perpetuated dominance of their designated dwellings on the plantation landscape.<sup>91</sup>

It is important to consider the methods by which slaves took unofficial ownership of the various spaces they occupied. The artifacts found in relation to the proposed multi-use building being excavated at Mont Repose confirm many of these forms of usage. The importance of these artifacts lies in their identification and theoretical use. This building, which has been identified as multi-use, can be placed into a comparative context with other contemporary plantations and help designate the possible locations of other buildings at Mont Repose.

There is debate regarding the issue of provisional adequacy at rice plantations. Many economic and practical factors influenced the frequency and schedule of clothing distribution by planters.<sup>92</sup> Any irregularity in consumption or distribution of provisions may have created the necessity for supplementation. Mont Repose was an extremely

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<sup>90</sup> Stampp, Kenneth. pg. 290; Clarke, Erskine. pg. 183;

<sup>91</sup> Vlach, John Michael. (1993). Pg. 4

<sup>92</sup> Genovese, Eugene D. (1972). *Roll Jordan, Roll*

profitable rice plantation cultivated by more than two hundred and twenty slaves at one point in the 1840s. During the decades immediately before and after the established mean ceramic date of 1802, Mont Repose presumably saw an increase in the number of slaves from thirty-nine to one hundred and fourteen between 1790 and 1800, and then another increase of slave population from one hundred and fourteen to one-hundred and thirty-six between 1800 and 1810.<sup>93</sup> If the Gillisons were like most plantation owners who speculated in slaves, these changes in population could have proven difficult to accommodate. The likelihood that Derry Gillison owned Mont Repose during the early years of the nineteenth century is based upon incomplete documentary evidence. Regardless of who had possession of Mont Repose, the Gillison family owned many slaves and would have likely faced provisional difficulties.

The various climatic, social, and botanical obstacles associated with lowcountry tidal rice cultivation may also have contributed to provisional shortage and spurred adaptation. During the first years of the nineteenth century, the Gillison family may have experienced increased adversity when provisioning their slaves. In *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic*, Erskine Clarke describes such conditions at Riceboro, in Liberty County, Georgia. In 1804 a hurricane struck the plantation, resulting in the loss of crops, provisions, and lives. Joseph Jones, the owner of Riceboro needed to take drastic measures to provide for his slaves but failed due to indebtedness.<sup>94</sup> Thus he was forced to sell many of his slaves and incur great debts, further disrupting the harmony and productiveness at Riceboro.

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<sup>93</sup> Census data, 1790, 1800, 1810, 1840

<sup>94</sup> Clarke, Erskine. pg. 12-13



A large population of slaves and their dependents may have been difficult to supply adequately with clothing and associated materials. As evidenced in past production of bone fasteners by other cultures, slaves used what was most plentiful and available to them in order to satisfy deficiencies in provision.<sup>95</sup> Whether they made bone buttons themselves or acquired them from an outside source, African-American slaves had the resources, skill, and motivation to use bone as a material for buttons and button blanks.

In addition to immediate clothing needs, slaves could have manufactured buttons at Mont Repose for trade.<sup>96</sup> Practitioners of the gang labor system of slavery limited the free time and autonomy of slaves by driving them to work until told to stop based upon command or time constraints. The task based labor system of slavery, in contrast, afforded slaves the ability to accomplish their tasks as quickly or slowly as they pleased provided they were pursued to completion. Tasks were assigned based upon the age and physical capability of the individual.<sup>97</sup> The slaves living on plantations which operated on a task based labor system had much more free time and autonomy to pursue activities not associated with crop cultivation than did those under a gang system. Traditionally, slaves were given Sunday to pursue religion and subsistence activities and in some instances, Saturday evenings as well.<sup>98</sup>

African-American slaves used their off-time to produce many things to improve their diet, pocketbooks, and relative independence. Lowcountry slaves used their free time to cultivate garden and tend livestock, both aimed at supplementing their diet. It

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<sup>95</sup> Genovese, Eugene. pg. 313; Joyner, Charles. pg. 129; Fogel, Robert William. pg. 191

<sup>96</sup> Joyner, Charles. pg. 129

<sup>97</sup> Joyner, Charles. pg. 43

<sup>98</sup> Genovese, Eugene. pg. 288;

also allowed them to hone many skills, such as the production of hand-made artifacts. At Mont Repose, slaves may have produced bone artifacts for personal use, community distribution, or outside trade. Off-times also provided the opportunity for slaves to pursue trade (illicit or otherwise) with each other, the owner of their plantation, and possibly nearby poor white residents or maroon populations, which inhabited the swamps and wilderness often found in the rural lowcountry. Trade goods may have included clothing as well as buttons and other bone artifacts. Any activity not directly sanctioned by the planter or overseer was an opportunity for passive resistance, or “day-to-day” resistance, which was an important concept for the enslaved.<sup>99</sup> If buttons were not produced at Mont Repose, it seems likely that the opportunities for trade presented by neighboring plantations, poor white residents, illicit populations, and the waterways surrounding Mont Repose allowed African-Americans to acquire what they needed.

In spite of laws prohibiting such activities, African-Americans raised vegetables, chickens, hogs, and sometimes cows and sold these goods to their owners. In South Carolina some plantation owners that observed this practice included Plowden C.J. Weston, Robert F.W. Allston, and James R. Sparkman.<sup>100</sup> Plantation owners recognized the benefits of slave self-sufficiency and largely ignored the laws. This form of production and trade between plantation residents resulted in a more efficient and less expensive model of farm life. Benevolent owners such as Weston allowed their slaves to use land to grow such staples as rice for consumption or sale.<sup>101</sup> The extremely wealthy planters living on the Rice Coast often possessed enough land to spare the acreage for supplemental agriculture. If not given permission to use land to grow and refine rice,

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<sup>99</sup> Fogel, Robert William. pg. 157; Clarke, Erskine. pg. 306

<sup>100</sup> Joyner, Charles, pg. 129; Genovese, Eugene. pg. 535

<sup>101</sup> Joyner, Charles, pg. 130

some slaves took it upon themselves to do so in an illicit fashion. Joyner gives an account of such an occurrence on page 130 of *Down By the Riverside*: “Define Horry, trusted driver on Joshua Ward’s estate, slipped into the swamp at night to thresh stolen rice on a hand-made mortar and pestle in order to earn extra money in a kind of underground economy”.<sup>102</sup> This underground economy of illicit trade spread far and was utilized by many individuals. According to many studies, the majority of commodity and labor exchange in the illicit trade network of the rural South was between African-American slaves and poor white farmers. Perhaps there was some joy to be found while passively resisting social order as dictated by the elite members of the lowcountry South Carolina planter class. The interactions between poor whites and slaves seem to have made sense and caused no great harm to any party.

As of 1817, South Carolina legislation prohibited trade between poor whites and African-American slaves without express permission from a slave’s owner. Of course, to serve their own purposes, most slave holders ignored legislation and allowed their slaves to go forth even with the likelihood that they would trade with whites.<sup>103</sup> It was also difficult and expensive to prosecute poor whites on the grounds of illegal trade. These conditions rendered the laws set against underground trade toothless in many ways. Illicit trade conducted by slaves benefited plantation owners as well. Absenteeism and the attitude planters had regarding illicit trade offered slaves the opportunity and motivation to pursue trade outside of the plantation. Slaves often conducted illicit trade with or without their owners’ permission or knowledge.

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<sup>102</sup> Joyner, Charles, pg. 130

<sup>103</sup> Richmond Enquirer. pg. 4

Slaves faced greater danger through illicit trade than their white trade partners. Slaves received beatings if found guilty of participating in underground trade activities. The official codes of many southern states made it unlawful for slaves to testify against any white person, lower class or elite. This made it possible for whites to absolve themselves of guilt to a degree when dealing with slaves. The white participants in underground trade, however, faced legal sanction. In spite of the obvious dangers associated with illicit trade, the benefits for all parties outweighed the possible consequences and underground trade flourished.

Due to the free time frequently allowed by the task system, slaves were able to supplement their pantries as well as their pockets. The animals, vegetables, fruits, and grains brought up by African-American slaves on large plantations were most likely enough to fill their stomachs as well as create a surplus for stockpile or trade. *In Slaves, Poor Whites, and the Underground Economy of the Rural Carolinas*, Jeff Forret suggests that black plantation residents more often exchanged goods with poor whites not for food but for luxury items.<sup>104</sup> To the contrary, it is also suggested by Forret that poor whites primarily sought food to supplement their meager and “monotonous” diet.<sup>105</sup> Clothing and other household goods were traded as well.

In the underground economy conducted between slaves and poor white farmers, it seems likely that many items offered by slaves came from theft. Absentee owners and the overseers left in their stead could have done little to discourage the stealing of goods by slaves. Forret suggests a correlation between slaves whom traded illicitly and the size of the plantation they resided on. Residents of larger plantations would have had access

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<sup>104</sup> Forret, Jeff. pg. 4

<sup>105</sup> Forret, Jeff. pg. 5

to wider varieties and greater quantities of goods, all of which would have been easier to steal. According to census and court records, most slaves associated with theft and illegal trade lived on plantations with slave populations exceeding twenty-six individuals.

In the seventy years during which slaves resided at Mont Repose, the average number of enslaved persons far exceeds the standard for a large plantation.<sup>106</sup> This indicates the likelihood that illicit trade between poor whites living in the rural coastal plains and enslaved African-Americans living at Mont Repose took place, with some trade possibly conducted with stolen goods. The illicit trade market gave slaves the opportunity to rid themselves of excess or pilfered goods with quickness and relative ease. Under the tenuous conditions of illicit trade, poor whites stood to profit at the expense of slaves, and certainly they did.<sup>107</sup> Despite this, it seems possible that illicit trade was present near Mont Repose. The lure of necessary and luxury items may have provided the motivation the Gillisons' slaves needed to produce bone artifacts as well as other goods for trade.

Participants from every class of Southern society benefited from the off-time activities of slaves. Poor whites were able to supplement their diets and directly oppose the higher class. Plantation owners conserved goods and saved money due to the self-sufficiency of slaves. African-American slaves living under the task-system gained relative autonomy, skills, and sometimes monetary gain. Their cultural identity blossomed due to the refinement of material goods and social interactions. Southern culture benefited from the ideas and practices developed by African-Americans during their off-times.

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<sup>106</sup> Fogel, Robert William. pg. 50

<sup>107</sup> Lockley. pg. 39

The issues of cultural retention and the production of goods by slaves are intricately interrelated. For example, the amount of buttons recovered at Mont Repose thus far may suggest production on a larger scale than would have been necessary to supply the slave population there during the early nineteenth century. Inhabitants at Mont Repose could have acquired their bone buttons through trade outside of the plantation because there has been no physical evidence found to support the idea of a bone button manufacturer at Mont Repose. However, the lack of metal buttons in any large quantity at Mont Repose may indicate a greater demand for slave produced bone buttons. The absence of metal buttons at Mont Repose correlates with observations made at other sites regarding button manufacture. Regarding the finds at the Cabildo jail site, a prison contained within the Cabildo government building in New Orleans, Kimberly S. Hangar observed that the prisoners responded to a lack of uniforms by producing and maintaining their own clothing and related items.<sup>108</sup> African-American slaves may have dealt with a possible lack of regularly provisioned clothing in a similar fashion by producing their own clothing and fasteners. The prisoners at the Cabildo also participated in bone button production, applying similar methods to those used at Brimstone Hill. Barbara Heath's work at Poplar Forest also details interesting trends in button usage and disposal by slaves.<sup>109</sup> The evidence gathered from our excavations at Mont Repose as well as from other sources indicates with a high degree of likelihood that slaves supplemented their provisions through clothing repair and bone artifact production.

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<sup>108</sup> Hangar, Kimberly S. (1996) *Medley of Cultures: Louisiana History at the Cabildo*.

<sup>109</sup> Heath, Barbara. Oct. 6, 2000 *The Data are in the Details: Thoughts on the Unity of the Digital Archeological Archive of Chesapeake Slavery*.

It is apparent that slaves were capable and motivated individuals. Many sources describe the adaptive spirit of slaves concerning many aspects of life. The social and material advancement of enslaved African-Americans proceeded parallel with the development and adaptation of Southern agriculture and the plantation system. African-Americans were on the forefront of agricultural technology because they were the dominant source of labor in the Lower South for centuries. Regardless of the staple crop with which they were associated, however, slaves dedicated only a portion of their time to staple cultivation.<sup>110</sup> Enslaved men and women learned and adapted many techniques and materials to satisfy the demands of plantation life during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, rice plantation slaves also followed many avenues of occupation and recreation outside of agricultural production. When time permitted, African-American slaves produced goods for consumption and trade. They participated in the marketplace economy of rural and urban locales and asserted their position in society as well as influenced the linguistic, cultural, and social future of the South. This influence is palpable considering the bone artifacts found in only one building at Mont Repose. All of these items could have been produced or acquired at the plantation, at marketplace in a larger town, or through illicit trade with poor white South Carolinians.

Though they were captives of white enterprise, the population size and relative isolation of early African-Americans eventually led to greater social achievement. They were able to use their mastery of rice production to broker a more tolerable situation in some cases. New languages, symbolic and spoken were developed by slaves for better communication. Pidgin languages, which can be defined as having no native speakers,

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<sup>110</sup> Fogel and Engerman. pg. 43

evolved into creolized languages through subsequent generations of slavery. Those whom spoke these languages refined them and perpetuated their usage into the present. The many practitioners of Gullah culture are evidence of the retention of African and African-American customs. External and internal hierarchy sprang forth to best serve their needs and allowed the brightest and well prepared (through white and black influence alike) men and women to come forth onto the stage of a creolized culture. Despite the attempts made by plantation owners to exclude their slaves from formal educational pursuit, many were able to learn skills and became influential in their own fields. The carpenters and mechanics, artisans and mammies are testimony to enslaved African Americans' ability to develop and shine despite their dictated station in society. Their achievements and adaptations can be contextualized by examining the bone artifact assemblage from Mont Repose.

Many conclusions may be drawn from the bone artifacts collected thus far at Mont Repose. Mont Repose was a large and profitable plantation. Many slaves lived there and carried out the many domestic activities necessary to maintain agricultural and social productivity. Slaves took advantage of the typical labor system used in antebellum rice agriculture; the task system. This work paradigm and the relative social continuity inherent on a large plantation allowed slaves to cultivate many pursuits away from the fields. Slaves developed many skills and adapted their living conditions to suit their needs. The bone artifacts identified at Mont Repose are evidence of the influence slaves had upon their surroundings. When taken into context with the non-bone artifacts they are associated with, these bone items help designate the identity of the structure currently being excavated. This building was a multi-use structure, likely used for storage and a



wide range of domestic activities. These activities certainly included sewing, given the large amount of brass pins, thimbles, bone buttons, and possible needlecase fragments which were found in the same area and stratum spread across two units.

The large amount of bone buttons present in the archeological record of this single structure raise an interesting possibility. It is possible that bone buttons could have been manufactured at Mont Repose. The size of this plantation during the early nineteenth century indicates the likely presence of the kinds of tools necessary for bone button production. Frame saws, cutting blades, center bits and braces were used in bone button manufacture as well as lathes. Some or all of these implements may have been present at Mont Repose, and could have been sold after productivity and population diminished. Further excavations should be conducted on the same bluff currently under survey. A goal of future efforts should be to determine the location of other utility related buildings and to identify the detritus and tools associated with bone button production.

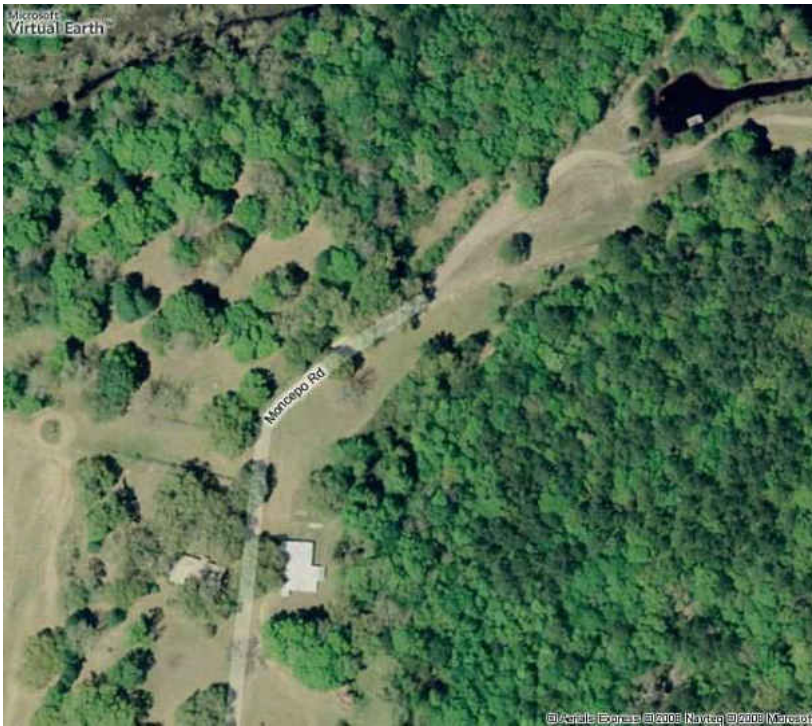
If it is determined that slaves produced bone buttons at Mont Repose, the trade and provisioning implications would prove valuable to future studies of slave's social and material cultures. The many plantations and small farms in the surrounding countryside offered Mont Repose's African-American population the opportunity to broaden their world. Very few of the sites near Mont Repose have been excavated or surveyed. This region will reveal new insights into the incredibly profitable rice culture of colonial and antebellum South Carolina as well as the African-American slaves who made it possible. This study provides a general background for the social, material, vocational, and cultural lives of plantation slaves in South Carolina.



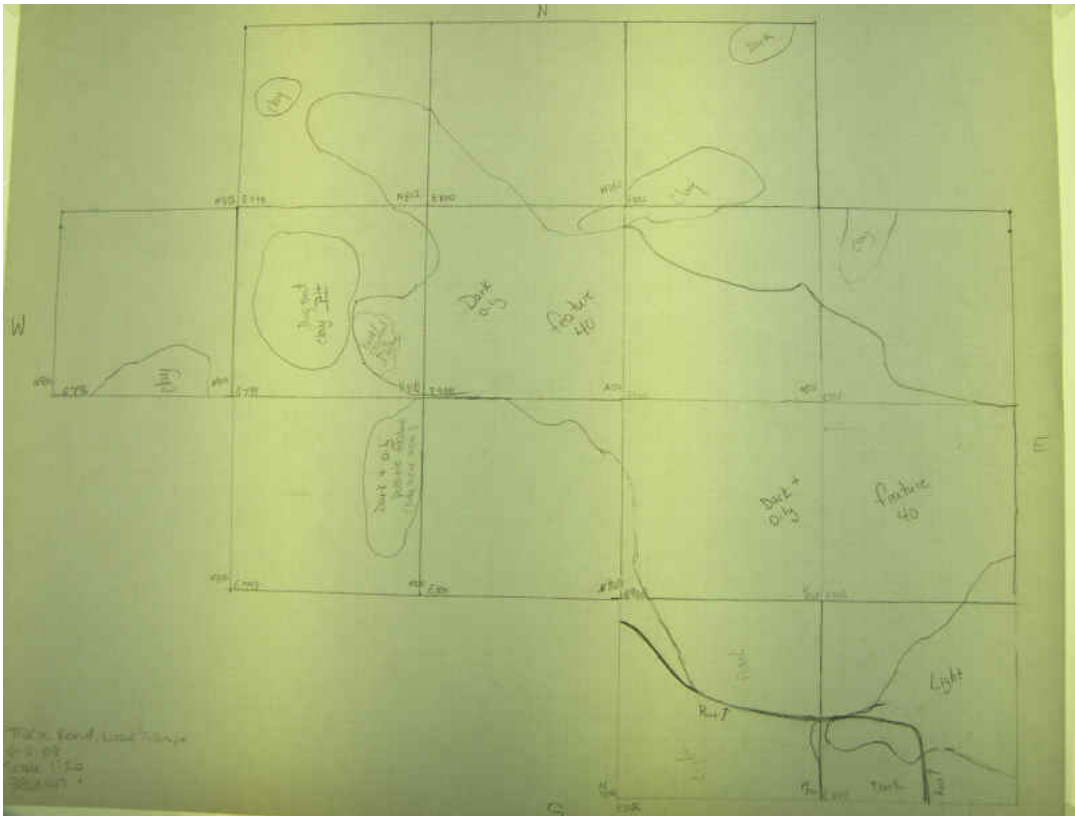
## Figures



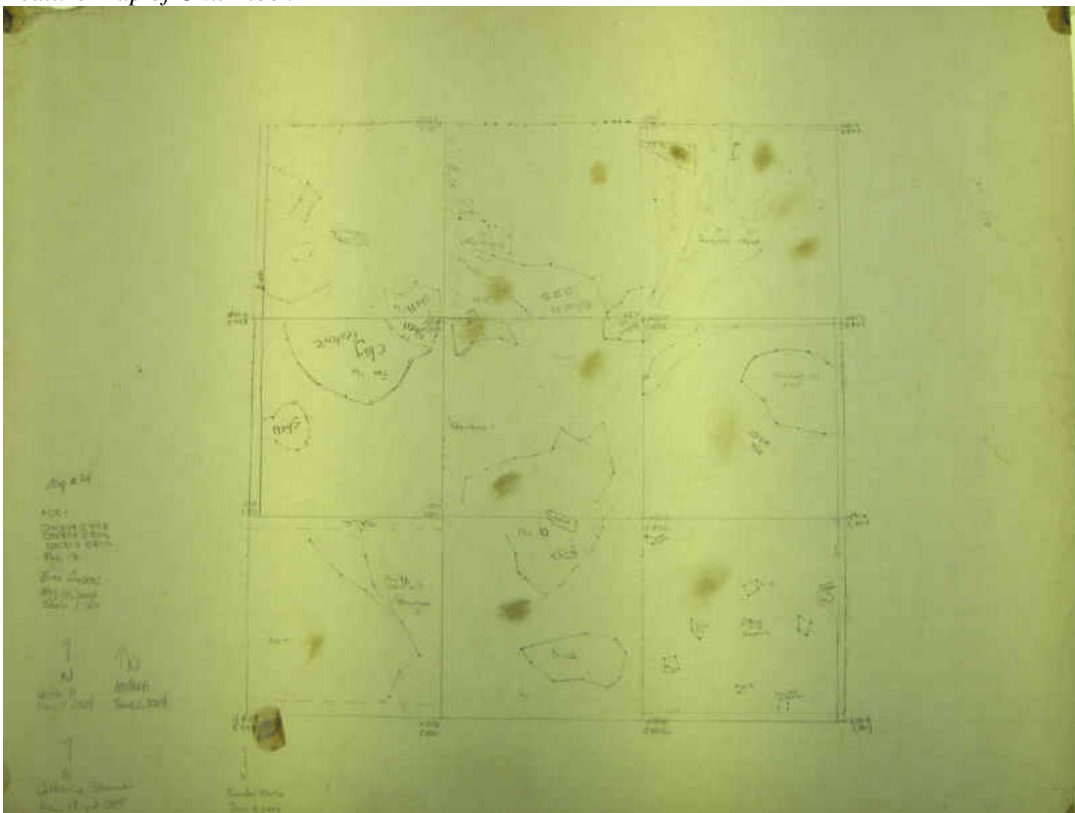
*Aerial Photograph of Mont Repose, ca. 2008*



*Aerial Photograph; Detail of the bluff area, ca. 2008*



*Feature Map of Unit Block*



*Feature Map showing location of some artifacts in original nine Unit Block*

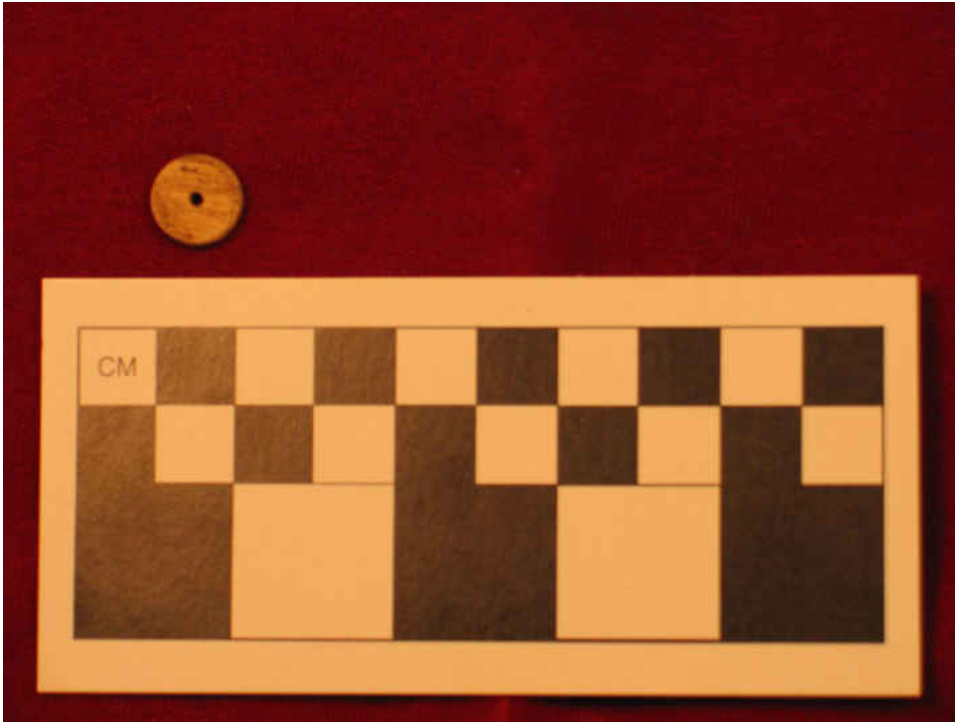




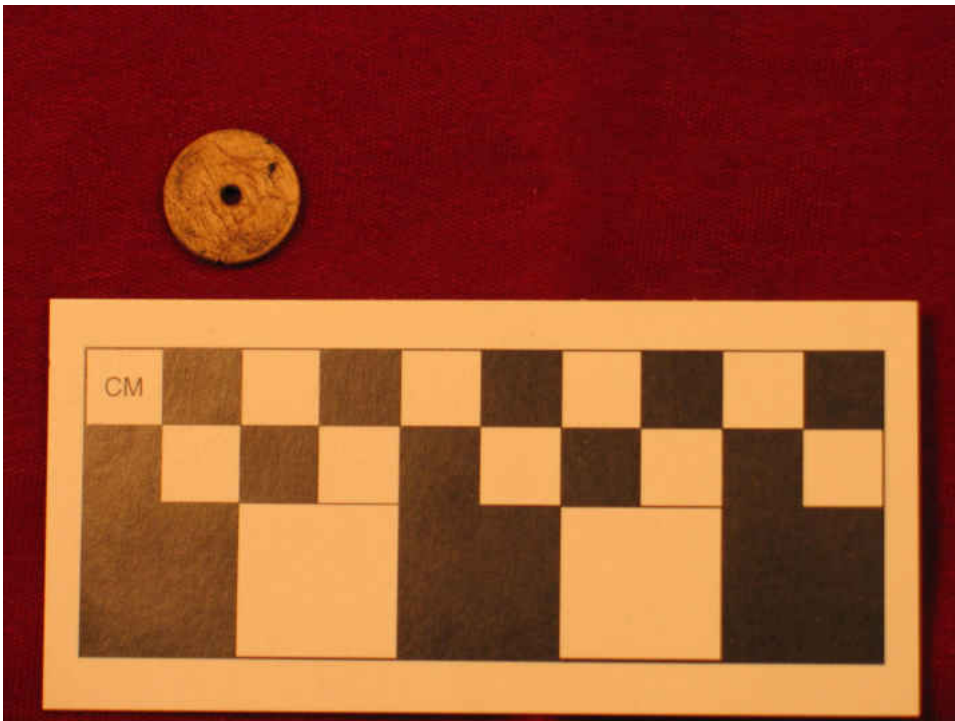
*Photograph facing east, looking over units N808 E798, N808 E800, and N808 E802*



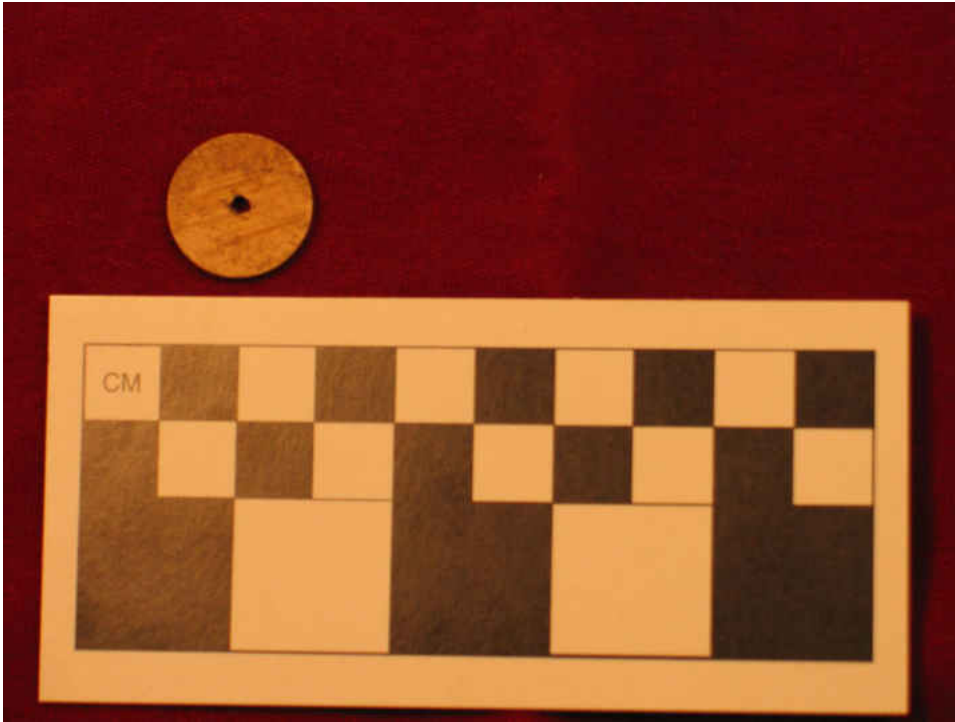
*Photograph facing east, looking over all nine units of original Block; possible postholes can be seen starting at the bottom of the picture then proceeding to top of picture (darker stains in soil)*



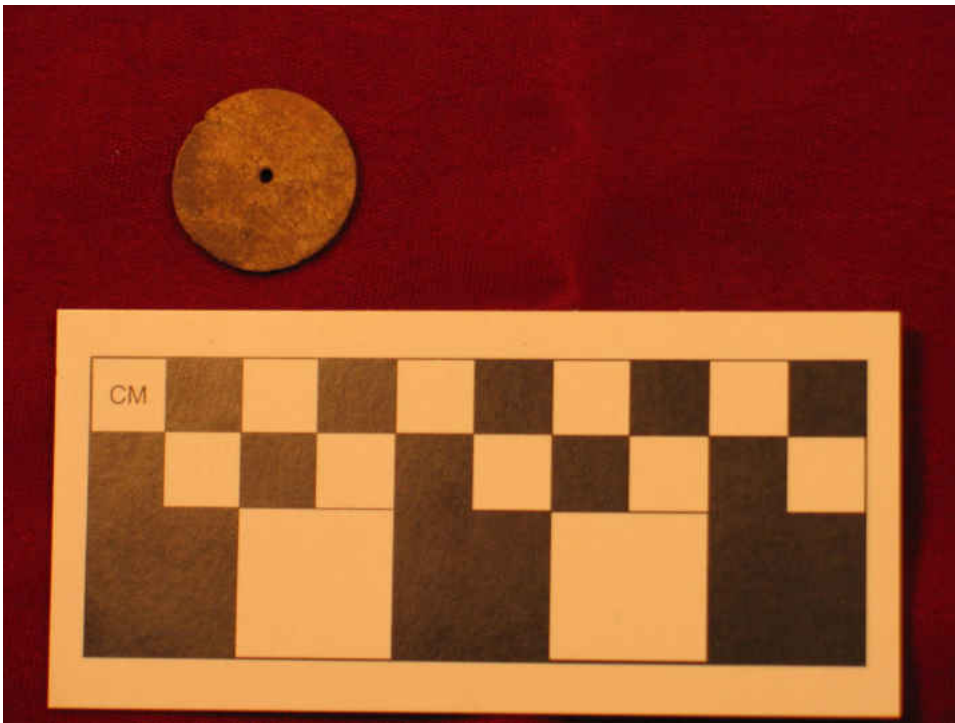
*Button Type #15, FS #501*



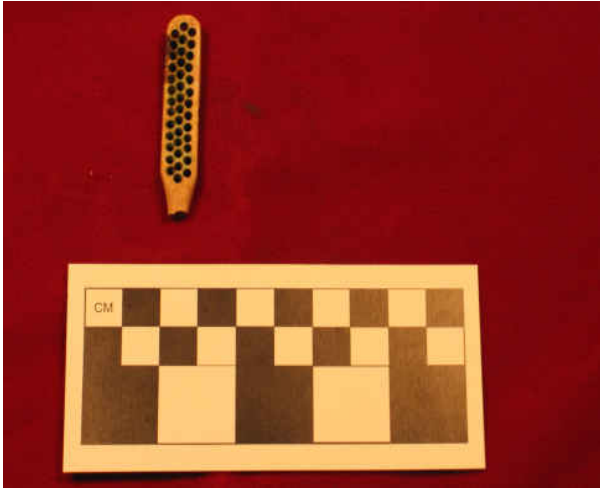
*Button Type #15, FS #381*



*Button Type #15, FS #381*



*Button Type #15, FS #548*



*Toothbrush fragment, FS #381*



*Toothbrush fragment, FS #381*

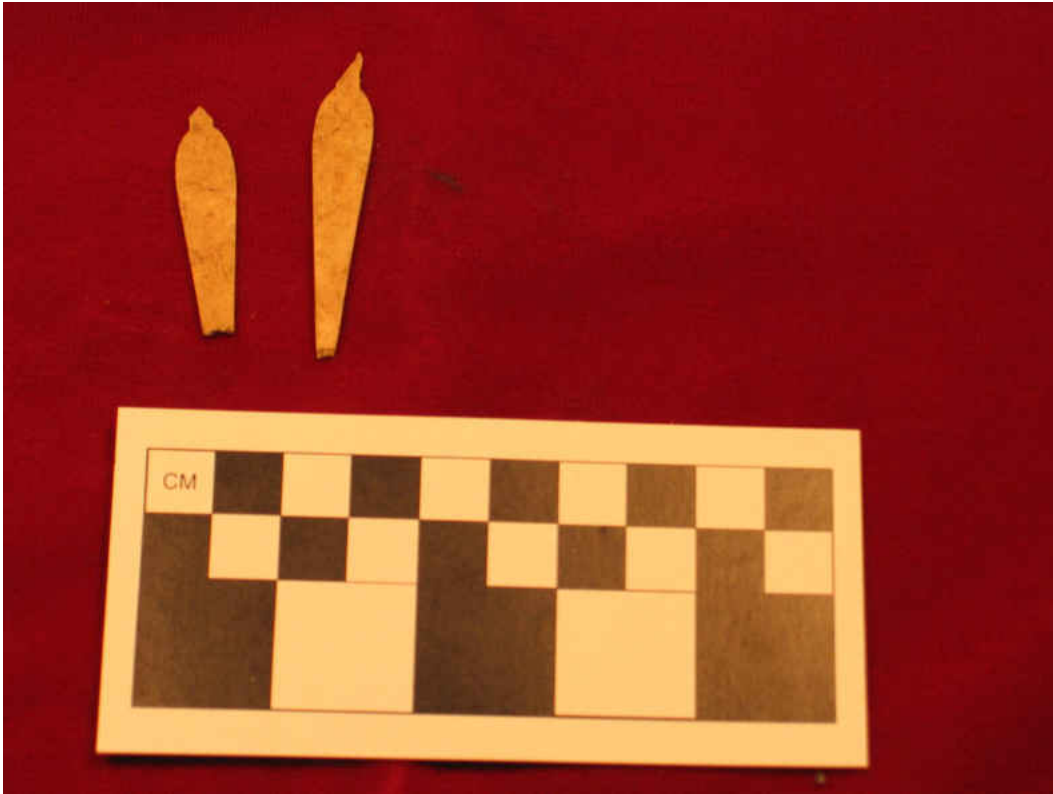




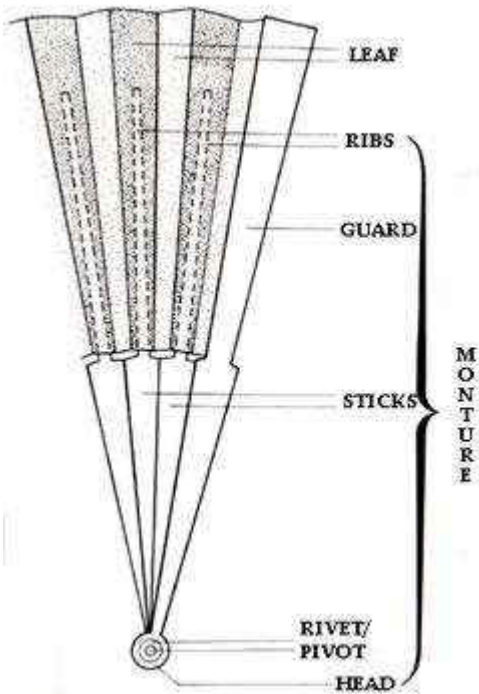
*Lice Comb fragment, FS #380*



*Lice Comb fragment, FS #680*



*Hand Fan Sticks, FS #548*



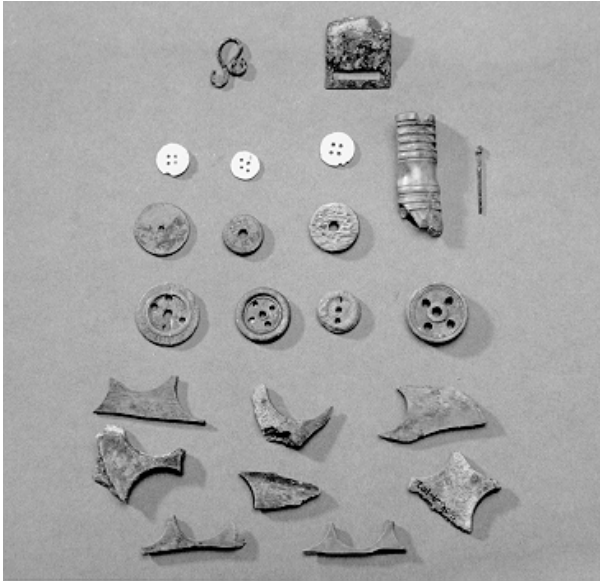
*Diagram of hand fan anatomy*



*Possible Needle case fragment/ Flywhisk fragment, FS #549*



*Possible Needle case fragments, FS #598*



*The item in the second row, furthest to the right, is a needle case fragment from the Cabildo Government Building, New Orleans, LA.*



*Bone handled knife, FS #430*



*Bone handled fork, FS #548*

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