

Preserving History Through Archaeology



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GWINNETT ARCHAEOLOGY BULLETIN

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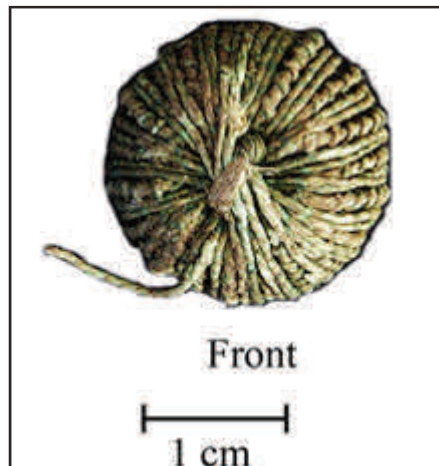
Digging Deeper into Sapelo's Past

Excerpts of article by Kevin Kiernan that was featured in the Preservation Posts December 2016 issue. Photographs by Richard Jefferies and Kevin Kiernan.

During this past summer University of Kentucky archaeologist Richard Jefferies and his crew of graduate and undergraduate students returned to Sapelo Island to continue their work on the Sapelo Island Mission Period Archaeological Project (SIMPAP).

During the previous 13 years, Jefferies and his colleague Christopher Moore of the University of Indianapolis have systematically investigated an expansive area north of the famous shell rings on Sapelo Island (Site 9Mc23). With a combination of extensive shovel probing, unit excavation, and geophysical prospection, the archaeologists uncovered a wide range of Spanish Mission-era

evidence—including sherds of Spanish majolica pottery, pieces of olive jars, wrought-iron nails, glass beads, a small brass bell, an elegant cloth-covered button (*pictured below*) plausibly from a vestment,



Altamaha sherds, and much evidence of Guale-Spanish interaction in Altamaha red-filmed colonoware.

Because most Georgians trace their history to the founding of the Georgia colony by James Edward Oglethorpe in 1733, the Spanish period on the Georgia coast is generally not well known. The Spanish presence began two centuries prior to the English colony when “Georgia” was part of La Florida. The Spanish missions began

in the 16th Century and flourished through most of the 17th. In a precursor to the Trail of Tears, English colonists from South Carolina and their Indian allies late in

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this period began attacking and burning the missions, killing, or enslaving the mission Indians, and ultimately forcing the mass migration of the survivors from their homelands progressively south toward St. Augustine. The space was in this way cleared for a new colony. For a time during this turbulent period, Indians from the north, including non-Christianized Yamasee as well as Guale from other missions, considered Sapelo Island with its own mission of San Joseph de Sapelo (or San José de Zapala) a safe haven.

Despite determined research and fieldwork through the past 50 years, archaeologists still do not yet know how and where the island accommodated these very different communities. However, documentary evidence (particularly contemporary Spanish maps) place the San José mission in the northwestern reaches of Sapelo Island, north of the shell rings. Over the past dozen years, the archaeological evidence has convincingly shown that there were indeed Spanish and mission-era Indians living here.

The major objectives of the excavations this past summer were to renew geophysical surveys with updated equipment throughout the area and to open and analyze a pair of 2x2-meter excavation units (Nos. 52 and 53) in the heart of this area. Jefferies took charge of the unit excavations, while training his undergraduate crew members in archaeological methods.

In the course of excavating the first 2x2m unit, Jefferies detected a feature—regular stains of organic matter—which he thought might be the vestiges of a wall trench diagonally crossing the unit in a southeast to northwest



direction. When he prepared to dig the adjacent unit 53, Jefferies decided to leave a 20 cm-thick earthen wall between the units to allow him to study the feature's profile as it passed through this wall. The feature reappeared as expected in the new excavation unit, once the upper 30 cm of soil was removed. Jefferies then dug a 45x45cm square into the feature to view it in cross section, where he discovered what began as a 15cm-long square nail (*pictured left*). The blacksmith had shaped the nail at the forge into a curve—apparently to form a hook to hang pots or other items. The occurrence of this artifact, along with other architectural hardware from nearby, support the idea that the excavation units are

exposing the remains of one or more Mission period structures. Jefferies and Moore will extend their investigations in this area next season.

Projects like the one on Sapelo continue to present excellent educational opportunities for undergraduates. Firsthand fieldwork is an essential supplement to the classroom and laboratory. Students learn field methods with a mature archaeological project. For example, Abbie Webber, a second-year University of Kentucky (UK) Anthropology major, learned critical recording procedures for all phases of the excavation of a unit this summer. Among other things, she was put in charge of determining soil coloration of the excavation levels with Munsell color charts. Likewise, Chris Maynard, an undecided UK major, received a deep orientation to one of the areas he is considering for his future (archaeology). He was a jack-of-all-trades, pounding stakes, preparing grids, cutting underbrush, carrying heavy equipment, screening, and backfilling excavation units.

While Jefferies and his undergraduate crew members worked on the excavations, the UK graduate students took charge of the new geophysical surveys. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources preceded them with bush hogs to clear away as much of the palmettos and thick underbrush as possible. Unfortunately, the success of geophysical surveys depends on favorable conditions. The jungle-like terrain in this part of Sapelo is a real challenge. Even after the bush hogs had opened wide spaces for the surveys, all crew members had to wield axes and machetes to clear the many missed areas. Only then could they pound stakes and run ropes for the grids required for the ground-penetrating radar (GPR) and magnetometry.

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The summer project gave graduate students Vanessa Hanvey and Tyler Stumpf the opportunity to put newly acquired geophysical techniques to work. Previous geophysical feasibility surveys have suggested anomalies warranting further research in areas where the archaeologists have found Spanish artifacts and architectural features. The surveys this summer focused on areas north of and adjacent to them. The results of Hanvey and Stumpf's GPR and magnetometer surveys produced numerous anomalies suggesting possible locations of additional mission-era structures. The area under investigation is an eclectic sitewhere many different cultures have resided over the millennia. For example, in a previous season the archaeologists found a figural clay pipe (*pictured right*), which they dated to the Late Irene or early Altamaha period.



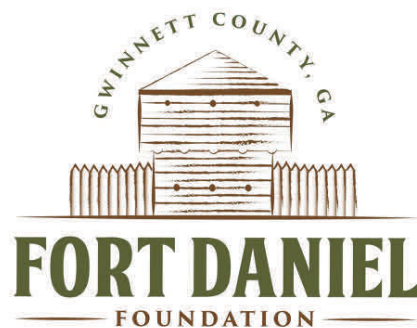
The archaeologists also found in another excavation unit a whelk shell that had been cut to form a drinking cup and decorated with incisions along its rim. The stains within suggest that it was likely used to hold the black drink, or cassina, around the time that the Spanish were starting the missions.

It remains unclear who exactly inhabited this area. It is possible that the Guale, the original residents of the San Joseph mission and pueblo, vacated this site moving to a safer, more remote area on the island as the danger of raids by the English and their Indian allies, the Westo, increased. Perhaps Yamassee and other Guale refugees moved here trying to escape attack from the north by English-backed native groups. These refugees, who came from tribes that were not always compatible, may also have chosen to move to more secure, as yet undiscovered, places on the island, too. Although they have sought and found evidence of Spanish missions on Sapelo over the past hundred years, archaeologists and historians will be kept busy on this island for many more years to come. ■ GHPD

GARS/FDF News

- With a new year comes new beginnings! The Archaeology Lab Days have been revamped—introducing Fort Daniel Archaeological Lab's interactive lessons and activities! Each month will have an overall theme, such as Preservation Laws or Native American History, which will pair with the monthly Gwinnett Archaeological Research Society (GARS) meeting/lecture and two lab days. The lab days will include one lesson/discussion and one activity meant to engage our members and guests with practical information and skills used in the fields of archaeology and history. The month of January's theme is Fort Daniel History/Lab 101. ***The next lab day will be on Saturday, January 7 at Fort Daniel Archaeology Lab beginning at 1PM. (Please notice the time change!)*** People will be given an intimate introduction to Fort Daniel's history—both the fort itself and the organizations that have worked to preserve the site and bring it to the public. Come, learn, and bring your curiosity! For more information about upcoming Lab Days and GARS events check out the [GARS Web site](#) and [Facebook page](#).
- The **Fort Daniel Foundation (FDF) Annual Meeting will be on Tuesday, January 17 at Fort Daniel beginning at 7PM.** The guest speaker is Dr. Kathryn Deeley, professor of anthropology at Georgia Gwinnett College. She will speak on "30 years of Public Archaeology: A History of and Reflection on Archaeology in Annapolis." The meeting is opened to the public.
- *There will not be a GARS meeting this month due to the FDF Annual Meeting. However, GARS members are encouraged to attend the Annual Meeting. The next GARS meeting will be on Tuesday, February 21. The guest speaker will be Sara Gale, Program Manager for New South Associates. She will be speaking about preservation laws in Georgia.*

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Medical Arts Building on National Register of Historic Places

Included on the Georgia Trust's Places in Peril list in 2011, the Medical Arts Building was added to the National Register of Historic Places last month. This Beaux-Arts style building is located at 384 Peachtree Street NE at the northern end of Downtown Atlanta. The 12-story brick and limestone building by architect G. Lloyd Preacher (also designer of Atlanta City Hall) was constructed in 1927.

In addition to its medical facilities—deemed as some of the most modern and well-equipped when it opened—the building once featured a cafeteria, drug-store, and telegraph office. It was also amongst the first to have a covered parking garage.

The Medical Arts Building is an excellent model of an early 20th-century midrise office building utilizing Neoclassical elements of pilasters, decorative cornice,



and clean lines. The structure of the building is steel frame encased with concrete and also utilizes terracotta tile for fireproofing. The three-part exterior features a base with storefronts clad with limestone on floors

one and two (on both Peachtree Street and the north elevation), a shaft clad in buff brick veneer on floors three through ten, and a capital of buff brick on floors 11 and 12 that is capped with a pressed-metal cornice. Remaining interior features include corridors with marble floors, original metal doors with transoms, grand staircase with decorative metal railing, and elevator lobbies with marble floors and baseboards.

The building is one of a few surviving examples of the expansion of Atlanta's central business district north of Five Points during the first three decades of the 20th century. ■

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