

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
TENTH SYMPOSIUM
ON THE
NATURAL HISTORY OF THE BAHAMAS

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Gerace Research Center, Ltd.
San Salvador, Bahamas
2005

Cover photograph – “Little Ricky” - juvenile dolphin, San Salvador, Bahamas (courtesy of Sandra Voegeli, 2003)

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Printed in the Bahamas

ISBN 0-935909-76-1

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ORIGIN, HISTORICAL, AND SEDIMENTOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ARCHEOLOGICAL ARTIFACTS; SOUTH BLANKET SOUND, ANDROS ISLAND, BAHAMAS

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ABSTRACT

Artifacts of broken pottery, trade pipes, household goods, fashion accessories and toys have been collected episodically for over a decade (1989-present) from a naturally eroding, 15 meter segment of beach face due south of Forfar Field Station, leeward of Calabash Cay, South Blanket Sound, Andros Island, Bahamas. The collection totals more than 1500 pieces with over 200 having identifiable features. Many of the fragments had extensive painted or applied patterns and, in some cases manufacturer names or marks present. Most seem to be of English origin. The accumulated materials were compared to the reference collection at Ball State University's (Indiana) Archeological Resource Management Services. Dates determined range from 1780 to 1890 with most concentrated from 1840-1860. Oral histories from the vicinity were collected via interviews with three octogenarians that have resided in the area since birth. Their accounts of events told them from parents and grandparents imply that the site may be a former intermittent trading center. Investigation from other sources suggests that this area may have been an episodic trade center and launch pad for the final leg of American Civil War era blockade-runners utilized by the Confederacy, Great Britain, and the Androsians. Though the site was completely covered by more than a meter of sand by hurricane Michelle (2001), it has begun to yield additional artifacts in August 2002. Sedimentation evidence from the site is used to help determine the rates of accumulation in the small embayment for the past few centuries.

INTRODUCTION

Andros Island, Bahamas is a remote domain of the Caribbean that is rich in culture as well as history. The history of Andros Island is better understood by analyzing the history of the Bahamas as a whole. In 1492, Christopher Columbus was the first to discover the Bahamas when he landed on San Salvador Island. The Lucayan Indians were the first true inhabitants of the Bahamian Islands, but eventually periled from pirates, slave owners, and disease that they encountered in the 16th and 17th century. The Bahamians have been influenced by the Spaniards, the Puritan movement, and Great Britain, and by 1629, the Bahamas became a British propriety (Rogozinski, 1992 & Craton, 1968). Each island of the Bahamas has a unique history of its own, and Andros Island is no different.

Since 1989, several artifacts have been discovered eroding from the banks of a small (<100 meters) beachface along the coast of Andros Island in a cove leeward of Calabash Cay near the communities of South Blanket Sound (population 120) and Big Pond Settlement (population 40). Inadvertent discovery of small broken pieces of pottery from the beach in this very localized area, 40 feet long, were originally observed and collected by Vicki and Sandy Hollock, co-directors of Forfar Filed Station (IFS). Collecting has continued intermittently over the past decade. The location of the specific study site has been kept to only a few people. Thus the collection in hand seems to be a reasonable representation of the total material available (Wiedman, 2001). The collection consists primarily of various ceramic, domestic items including dishes, bowls, and cups, as well as fewer household items such as smoking pipes

and parts of children's toys. Most of the pottery is of little archeological value due to a lack of identifiable patterns or marks. However, more than one hundred sherds have identifiable features.

Discussions with life-long local residents, currently in their 80's, have indicated an oral history dating back two additional generations that includes mention of commercial ships from Europe, primarily Britain, anchored offshore of Andros Island near Calabash Cay, that established occasional trading centers near the site that the artifacts were discovered. The consensus of the oral tradition implies that the trading posts were established during the pre-Civil War era.

It is known that the Bahamas was a British colony, but it is not understood why such an abundance of presumed British artifacts would be restricted to such a remote, yet precise location on Andros Island. The goal of this investigation is to attempt to determine the history of the site with respect to the materials found by comparing this collection to known repositories of European trading supplies, and deduce the manner in which this collection came to be on Andros Island. Repositories of such materials were discovered to be located at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana in the Department of Archeological Resources Management Service.

METHODS

The location of the artifacts that were collected on South Blanket Sound was at 25° 07.73 North and 078° 10.63 West, according to the global positioning satellite unit. The collection of pottery remnants has continued over the past ten years. The collection of artifacts was augmented during late December of 2001 and early January of 2002 at the site where the original sherds were discovered. Further collecting seems unlikely to add specimens as the site was literally buried under several feet of sediment during the tropical storm *Hurricane Michelle* in October of 2001.

The extensive collection was identified and comparisons were conducted with preexisting British collections. Ball State University, in

Muncie, Indiana has an abundant, catalogued collection of period pottery remnants from America and Europe are repositied. Their collection includes artifacts from both the pre and post-Civil War era. The University not only has a substantial artifact collection, but also an archeological library equipped with literature able to identify and distinguish between several eras and origins. By utilizing the University's collection as well as archeological identification literature, the collection of artifacts from Andros Island were identified and historically dated in order to determine the origin of the material and subsequent existence of British trading sites on Andros Island.

RESULTS

Greater than 1000 sherds have been retrieved since informal collecting at the site began. Approximately two-thirds lacked any type of identifiable characteristics either in form or applied design. Those items that could be accurately identified primarily dated between the years of 1780 and 1890. The majority of the collection was dated between the years of 1840 and 1860. The collections includes Hand-painted White-ware, Whiteware Transfer Print, Transfer Print Flowblue, Whiteware Polychrome, Whiteware Embossed Motifs, Whiteware Interior Hand-painting, Pearlware with Shelledge, Blue Transfer Print with Oriental Motifs, Stoneware, Yellowware, Porcelain, and Whiteware Sponge Print (Feldhues, 1995; Hume, 1969). Age determination for several of the remnants is still being investigated. Many of the remnants include pipe stems and pipe bowls. Several of the pipe stems have distinguishable marks. These marks include imprints of the words "London" and "E Church." Pipe stems are most readily dated by analysis of pipe stem length and pipe bowl circumference. Because the pipe stems in this collection are in fragments, they were unable to be identified and dated at this time (Sudbury, ed., 1986).

ARTIFACTS OF SPECIFIC INTEREST

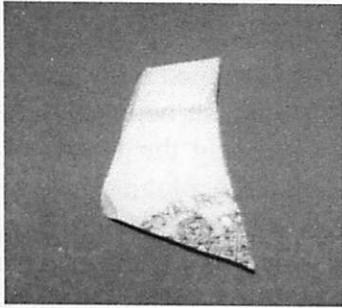


Figure 1. Royal Ironstone China, Alfred Meakin England Turnstall, Great Britain Est. 1881 (Kovel, 1979)

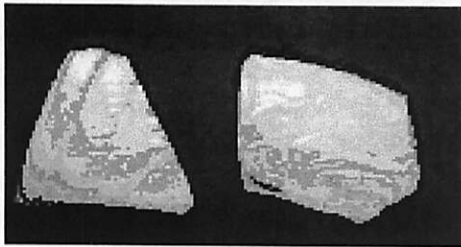


Figure 2. Yellowware Bowl Fragments
Date: Origin of 1830 (Feldhues, 1985)



Figure 3. Whitewater Transfer Print Red
Date: 1828-1850 (Feldhues, 1995)

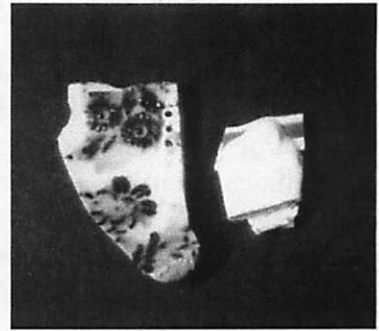


Figure 4. Whiteware Embossed Motif
Date: 1800-1830 (Lofstrom et al, 1982)



Figure 5. Whiteware Transfer Print
Flowblue Date: 1844-1860 (Lofstrom et al, 1982)



Figure 6. Blueware Date: Unknown
(Cochran, 2002)

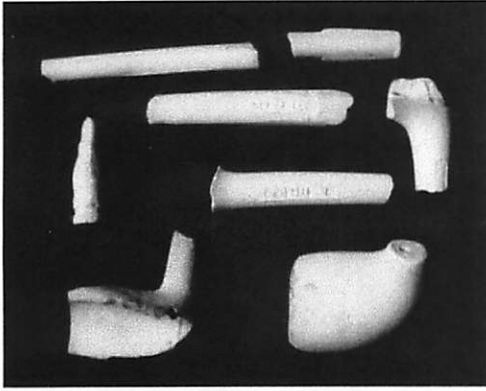


Figure 7. Pip Stems & Bowl Fragments
Inscription: "E Church" Inscription: "London"
Date: Unknown (Cochran, 2002)

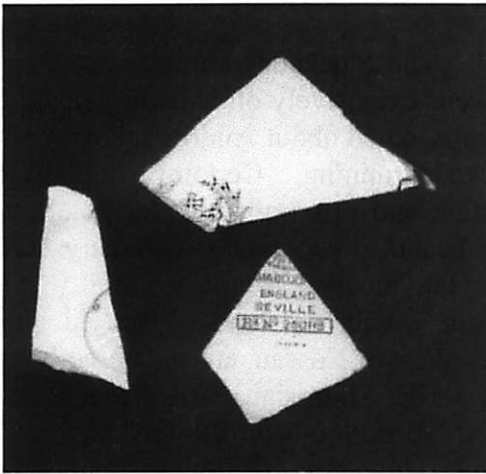


Figure 8. Unidentified Manufacture's
Date: Unknown

There are additional artifacts within the collection that are not exhibited in the pictures presented.

DISSCUSSION

The foundation of this study is rooted in oral tradition. Bubba Colebrook (personal communications, 1998), a life-time resident of Big Pond Settlement near South Blanket Sound, who is in his late 80's, verbalized that he remembers sto-

ries that his grandparents would tell of their childhood to he, his siblings, and his parents. This information was echoed by two other Octogenarians, life-long residents, sisters, Emily Johnson and Mirely Colebrook (taped communications 1999). According to oral tradition, large commercial trading ships would sail into the natural channel that separates South Blanket Sound from Calabash Cay. Upon anchoring of the ships, small johnboats would travel between the ship and the shoreline with trade goods, a high business aspiration, in order to trade with local Bahamians, as well as British colonists who had established homes and plantations on Andros Island. Residing on Andros Island in the early 1800's was a symbol of wealth and prestige for many British colonists. Those who were retired government officials, Loyalists to the crown of England, or wealthy British landowners with influential power were provided land on Andros Island from the British government (Craton, 1968). Although Andros Island's land is not the richest in resources, several farms and plantation were able to produce pineapple, cotton, and some tobacco. Andros Island was a dynamic exporter of resources such as hemp, fish, and sponges (Craton, 1968). Although Andros Island did not serve as the Mecca of the Bahamas as Nassau did, it was competitive with the trade industry for certain goods.

Although a small market niche, central Andros could provide a worthy market for such goods as discovered at the site and be a ready source for needed citrus fruits, fresh water, and some unique items for later trade in other locales. Trade became a pivotal economic factor for the Bahamas in 1861 with the beginning of the American Civil War. The Confederate States began to fire on the Federal forts in 1861. In order for the Confederate States to remain competitive, they became dependent on imported resources. The sole production of the Confederacy was cotton, and the export of it to neighboring countries was the South's only means for economic survival (Craton, 1968).

During the first week of war, President Lincoln declared a blockade of all southern ports. This declaration not only effected the South, but also those who utilized the Confeder-

acy's cotton exports. Europe, primarily Great Britain, was sympathetic to the Confederacy's needs. Although slavery had been abolished in Great Britain between 1834 and 1838, many British not only supported the utilization of slavery for labor, but also needed access to the cotton exports. Because President Lincoln hastily declared the blockade, he had not established enough time for the Federal navy to implement it effectively, this allowed for the Confederacy and Great Britain to employ blockade runners, with many using the Bahamas as a port-a-call (Craton, 1968).

In the beginning, blockade running was profitable and with little danger for either the Confederacy or Great Britain. By 1862, the Federal navy had established an extensive fleet in order to abolish the blockade running. Blockade running became increasingly dangerous for the Confederacy and Great Britain, and new avenues had to be pursued for the running to continue. In January of 1862, the British Government implemented legislature in order to create neutrality for the Bahamas, which at the time was a British territory. By March 11, 1862, the Bahamas had established neutral waters with these words by the Governor, "preventing as possible the use of Her Majesty's harbours, ports, and coasts, and the waters within Her Majesty's territorial jurisdiction in aid of the warlike purposes of either belligerent." These words expressed a deeper meaning for those who supported the blockade running. The Bahamas neutrality would prevent any type of warships access to Bahamian waters, but merchant ships, which were utilized in the blockade running, would be safe upon their entrance into territorial waters, this allowed trade to continue between the Confederacy and Great Britain (Craton, 1968).

The Bahamas became a profitable trading center. Nassau became the prime location for cotton trade, a lucrative business for the island. Trade was documented in Nassau and the Berry Islands from 1860 to 1865. It is reported that *Robert E. Lee* ran the Federal blockade twenty-one times to the Bahamas from Charleston and Wilmington (Carlson, 1968). Subsequently, there were other divisions as well.

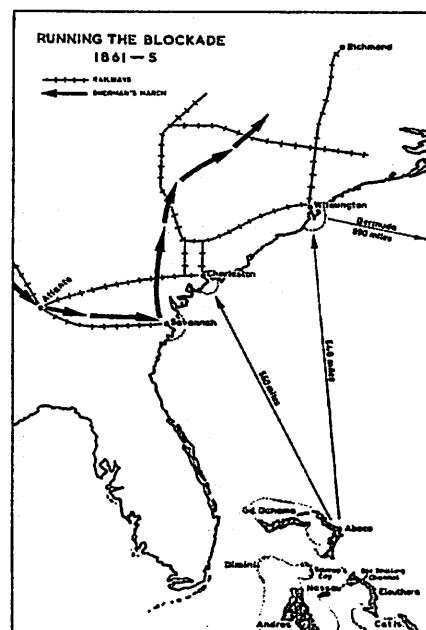


Figure 9. Blockade Running from Charleston and Wilmington to the Bahamas (Craton, 1968).

The blockade running was documented to occur extensively on Nassau, but little is historically noted about Andros Island's role in the blockade running. Certainly the geographical location and proximity to Florida allowed Andros Island to serve as a secondary-trading site after the blockade-runners initially traded on Nassau. Andros Island is located only thirty miles West of Nassau, an easy three-hour trip by boat. The Androsian barrier reef extends 100 miles, North/South on the East Side of Andros Island (University of Saint Francis Bahamas Field Guide, 2001). The totality of the reef makes access to Andros difficult. Although there are several man-made passes to the island today, during the time of the blockade running, there would have only been two natural passes to Andros Island through the barrier reef; South Pass and North Pass. South Pass is located directly North of South Blanket Sound and it extends for five to six miles (Zeisger, 2002) thus allowing easy entry to Calabash Cay. The Easterly Trade Winds as well as the Windward Passage facilitated travel from Nassau and other Bahamian Islands to South Blanket Sound, which the blockade-runners may have utilized

(Rogozinski, 1992). A natural channel lies in front of South Blanket Sound between the shore and Calabash Cay. The channel is currently three feet at low tide and five feet at high tide. It is approximated, according to sedimentation rates, that the depth of the channel has decreased approximately 3.5 feet every thirty years (Albertson, unpublished MS 1997). This approximates the depth of the channel to have been between 15-20 feet in 1861, during the time critical of interest. This substantial depth allowed large, for that era, merchant ships to pass through easily (Zeisger, 2002).

CONCLUSION

More information is needed to be conclusive, but circumstantial evidence leads to the conclusion that the local oral tradition of an active trading center (though somewhat episodic) may have been located in a protected bay on Andros Island near the current settlements of Big Pond and South Blanket Sound. Artifacts, including pottery, pipes, and toys, dated via manufacture's registry records and historical repositories at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana (2002), point to trading activity from 1780-1890 with a majority of the collection centering around the time on the American Civil War. Nothing discovered in either the literature nor field observation precludes this analysis. The limited extent of the site where materials appear to be eroding from the beach lends evidence to the supposition that it may represent a pit (garbage/refuge/personal hygiene) for those docking with trade goods. It is proposed that inferior or damaged goods were discarded in a manner that would discourage retrieval and subsequent use by the local Androsians. Unfortunately, further collecting has become nearly impossible after *Hurricane Michelle* hit the area, in October of 2001, which buried the study site beneath several feet of sediment.

As in trial law, these observations have provided motive and means. The best evidence may lie in the site itself. The location seems to have been favorable among others available at the time for landing and protecting the mother ship and the traders. The site is near large quan-

ties of readily available fresh water and there was easy access to the site by beach walking and the Stafford Creek tidal channel. Additionally, the artifacts seem to be concentrated within a 40-foot area with few exceptions. This centralization is a common occurrence in reoccurring trade sites and communal sites. Traders would often have some damage to trade goods (especially fragile ones like those found here). These would be further destroyed during unpacking and discarded in a manner that would preclude further use; often the fragments were tossed down outhouse pits; a rather effective method. If that were the case here, it would explain the concentration of artifacts in only one small site. This is again consistent with the proposed episodic trading center alluded to through the oral tradition of the settlements. This investigation concludes, from the presented evidence, that the site of interest was a trading center during the period of the American Civil War, more specifically during the time of the blockade running, that was utilized by the Confederacy, Great Britain, and the Androsians.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who made this research possible. A special thanks to International Field Studies for their generous grant that allowed funding for this investigation. A personal thank-you to Dr. Larry Wiedman who initiated the idea of this research and who housed the collection for many years. I would like to thank all of those added to the collection over the past decade, including the Hollock family, the Wiedman family, especially Claire (who is personally responsible for nearly ½ of the collected materials), and the University of Saint Francis students. I would also like to thank the University of Saint Francis for their readily available technology and resources to inter-library support. Most of all, I would like to thank those local residents of Andros Island that shared their time and their history.

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