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THE VIEW FROM THE DUMP: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY POLLY HILL SETTLEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Archaeology has played an important role in documenting life in the Out Islands during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the December 2008 field season, DePaul University conducted a site survey documenting Polly Hill Settlement, a community that developed west of the nineteenth-century Polly Plantation, excavated by DePaul University from 2005 to 2007. The project included documentation of nine structures at the site, which helps to demonstrate the development of local communities and house lots on the island. In addition, a mid-twentieth-century trash dump at one of the home sites was inventoried, providing insight into the economic connections between San Salvador and the outside world in the mid-twentieth century. This work and earlier oral interviews are used to understand mid-twentieth-century life on the island and in particular, the nature of San Salvador homes and material culture. This work extends our knowledge of the community called Polly Hill from the late eighteenth to the late twentieth centuries, documenting the cultural changes of an-out island community over 200 years.

INTRODUCTION

The abandoned structures at Polly Hill Settlement fall into three groups. Along the ridge west of the Queen's Highway are four older houses, probably constructed before World War II, and occupied into the 1960s (Bernie Storr 2009). Two newer houses, one with a substantial kitchen

kitchen structure, were built along the Queen's Highway, probably post-1950s when the present Queen's Highway was established, and occupied into the 1990s. South of these two communities was the Polly Hill school. All these buildings were mapped, profiled, photographed and their building methods and condition noted. In addition, a trash dump behind Building 1 on the ridge was investigated. All the existing artifacts, including bottles and bottle fragments, ceramics, and other items were inventoried *in situ*, photographed, and returned to the dump. No excavation was undertaken and no artifacts were collected or removed from the site.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY SAN SALVADOR

Previous work at Polly Hill Plantation has helped us to better understand the cultural changes on San Salvador from the late eighteenth through the early twentieth century. The American Revolution led to dramatic changes in The Bahamas; American Loyalists were forced to leave the newly-independent United States for other British colonies. The influx of American Loyalists and their slaves almost doubled the population of the colony, tripled the slave population, and increased the percentage of blacks in the population to about two-thirds. The Loyalists also created new settlements on previously-uninhabited out islands, including San Salvador. Initially the Loyalists tried to replicate the economy of the mainland, and established cotton plantations. By the early nineteenth century, most Bahamian slaves were no longer working in staple-crop agriculture but were exerting much of their labor on subsistence

farming, either on their own or alongside their masters (Baxter and Burton 2006, 7). Ultimately the slaves were transformed into a free Bahamian population whose lifeways became central to the creation of contemporary Bahamian culture. These transitions can be seen in several different material components of the plantation: the plantation landscape and plantation buildings and the artifacts and lifeways of the plantation.

Much of the landscape at Polly Hill can be attributed to the plantation's initial construction. Overall, it was ordered, structured, and well-defined; walls delineated various work and living spaces. The planter ordered the construction of various buildings using different materials to reinforce the hierarchy of the planter and his slaves. Planters lived in better-constructed buildings located at the highest point of the yard; the slaves lived in rough-stone structures at the edge of the yard. These intentions as evidenced in the standing structures were probably not fully realized at Polly Hill or many other Loyalist plantations. Although planters may have intended to recreate mainland colonial American norms for slave plantations, the collapse of the cotton economy in the late eighteenth century, soil erosion and the chenille infestation made it difficult for them to fully implement their patriarchal intentions. Artifactual evidence suggests that the planter brought a wide variety of ceramics to Polly Hill at the time of its initial construction, intending to settle at the Plantation. The lack of domestic artifacts, personal items belonging to women and children, and utilitarian kitchen ceramics, suggest that a planter family did not live at Polly Hill Plantation on a regular basis (Baxter and Burton, 2007).

Because of the absence of white planters, the plantation landscape underwent a series of transitions even before emancipation in 1834. Slaves appear to have appropriated some of the goods left behind by the planter and to have reverted to African outdoor cooking practices. Although slaves, and later freedmen, had some access to goods from the outside world, relatively few personal items beyond tobacco pipes were found. Slave and freedman clothing probably consisted of simple cotton garments. The faunal remains suggest a diet largely dependent on shell-

fish with a few domestic mammals. While the Manor House and its related kitchen were abandoned, the domestic slave quarter continued to be occupied for several decades after emancipation, showing continuity in the lifestyle of its residents before and after emancipation (Baxter and Burton 2007).

After emancipation, San Salvador began to undergo a series of transitions to solidify an Afro-Bahamian culture. Emancipation brought significant internal migration within the island and the creation of new settlements and communities. By the late nineteenth century, San Salvador residents struggled to participate in commercial agriculture, trying coconuts, citrus fruits, pineapples, Indian corn, and cattle raising, but in most years, inadequate boat service to Nassau made shipping crops to market difficult. Sisal seems to have been the only successful crop. San Salvador seems to have been at the edge of the world (Baxter and Burton 2006, 8).

Lifeways changed in important ways in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, embracing many of the characteristics of contemporary Bahamian culture. Residents abandoned some older buildings and converted others to new uses. In the case of Polly Hill, the older domestic slave quarter was abandoned, the plantation office was converted to a dwelling, and residents built a new separate kitchen, which included an open fireplace platform for cooking. A separate dump was established for the household outside the yard enclosure with latrines to the west, painting a picture of a household intent on keeping its yard area clean (Baxter and Burton 2007).

The artifact assemblage suggests a community with increased access to the outside world. A variety of glass bottles were found, including liquor and medicine bottles. Residents had some access to luxury goods as evidenced by table glass, including the top of a glass carafe, a perfume bottle stopper, and gramophone records. There was evidence of electricity at the site, certainly from a generator. Faunal remains suggest a diet based on fish, cow, sheep/goat, chicken, turtle, and seabirds (Baxter and Burton 2007).

TWENTIETH-CENTURY SAN SALVADOR

Life in the early twentieth century may have been more difficult for islanders than it had been just decades earlier. Although islanders had a cash crop in sisal, poverty led them over-harvest the plants regularly, reducing long-term yields, and prices fell after World War I. The population remained stable at about 700 until the 1950s and many young people left the island to work elsewhere in The Bahamas, or in Florida and South America, and rarely returned. On the east side of the island, United Estates had the island's only public school until the 1920s, usually serving about 50 students with one teacher. Although the government did construct a road between United Estates and Cockburn Town in the late nineteenth century, the primary means of moving goods between east and west was via the internal lakes, a time-consuming task taking several hours (Baxter and Burton 2006, White 1985, 13).

Most of the island residents lived largely by subsistence. The typical diet consisted of fish, chicken, goats, and pigs along with Indian corn, pigeon peas and various tropical fruits. Two crops a year could be planted, although the summer crop was often problematic due to drought and high temperatures. Communities were close-knit and traded goods and services (Baxter and Burton 2007, 10). By the 1930s, Polly Hill Plantation was abandoned, but some of its residents may have moved to a new settlement on the ridge directly west of the old plantation. This later community, called Polly Hill Settlement, shared some of the characteristics of the earlier one at the Plantation; however, the residents at the settlement were establishing a new community, not re-using an older plantation site, which allowed them to construct a landscape closer to their own norms and expectations

The 1950s saw dramatic changes in life-ways on San Salvador. The United States had gained leases for military bases throughout The Bahamas under the Lend-Lease Act at the start of World War II. In the 1950s, construction began on a U.S. missile tracking base and airstrip in Cockburn Town. Additionally, the U.S. established a Naval Tracking Station (now the Gerace

Research Centre) and a Coast Guard Station. These facilities brought new jobs to the island which began to transform the economy and life-ways of island residents. The military and the colonial government built the Queen's Highway, and increasingly, island residents moved to the west and north sides of the island to be closer to work there. By the 1960s, these bases began to close, but eventually were replaced by new installations, including the Gerace Research Centre, Riding Rock Inn, and Club Med (Shaklee 2009, 30-31).

LANDSCAPE

Unlike Polly Hill Plantation, with its orderly buildings focused on the planter's Manor House, Polly Hill Settlement was a more organic community, stretching along the ridge. The houses were located in various parts of the settlement, without any clear overall design. Older buildings, probably predating World War II, were located on the ridge west of the present Queen's Highway, convenient to the old path that ran from community to community along the ridge top. These houses would have better captured the prevailing breezes than those at the older plantation site (White 1985, 2). At least three households were centered on the ridge. All the buildings were of stone construction and the main houses were plastered inside and out. There is no evidence of shingling and they were probably thatched. Buildings 1 and 2, both residences, were approximately the same size, 6.5 by 4 meters, and one story in height (see Figures 1 and 2). Each has a front and back door, two windows in the front and back, and one on each of the sides. They differed significantly from the refurbished tenant house at Polly Hill Plantation; they were much smaller, had one room, doors facing toward and away from the water, and balanced pairs of windows.

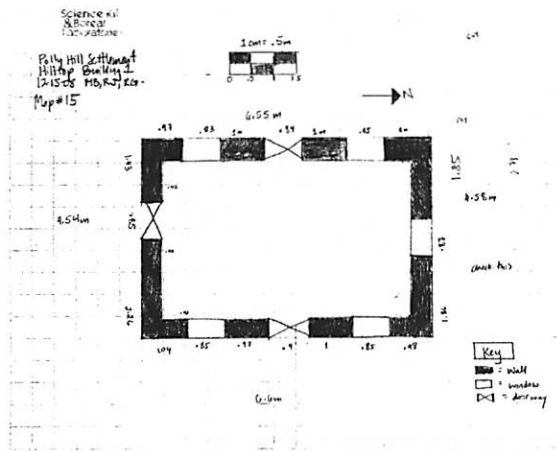


Figure 1: Ridge House 1, Polly Hill Settlement

Like the tenant house at Polly Hill Plantation, they had separate kitchens. Behind Building 1 was a small enclosed platform, 6 by 4.5 meters, probably the original kitchen. It may have been open at the sides with a wooden superstructure like some documented at Clifton Plantation. Building 2 had a second structure, now largely in ruins, that may have been a kitchen building. Building 3 is larger, 7 by 5 meters, but largely in ruins.

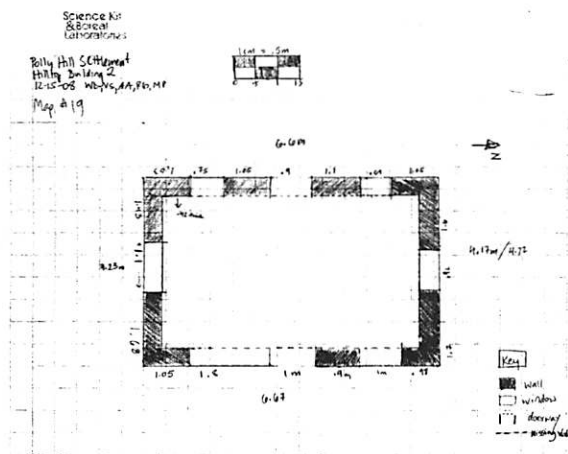


Figure 2: Ridge House 2, Polly Hill Settlement.

Buildings 1 and 2 conform to the Bahamian house type, with a single room and opposed windows and doors to allow maximum ventilation (see Figure 3). There was no evidence of window glazing, and the windows were probably originally covered with wooden shutters. Separate kitchens allowed for much of the household work

to be done outside, with the house itself used for sleeping and storage. The origins of this house design are unclear; the overall size and layout is similar to the slave quarters at Clifton Plantation on New Providence, and to some slave dwellings on San Salvador. These ridge homes also conform to the Georgian elements of a plantation manor house, but were smaller, without verandas, and built at ground level rather than with a raised cellar. Bahamians may have consciously or unconsciously emulated these older dwellings, mostly abandoned, in their own attempts at creating standard house designs. These ridge houses were abandoned by the 1960s (Bernie Storr 2009). Building 3, located north of Building 2, was 7.5 by 5.5 meters, was probably another domestic structure, but is largely in ruins. Building 4 was located west of Building 2 and was 6.5 by 5 meters. It, too, was largely in ruins, but may have served either as another domestic structure or a separate kitchen.



Figure 3: Ridge House 1, Polly Hill Settlement

Two additional house lots below the ridge along the Queen's Highway were studied. These houses probably date later than the houses on the ridge and reflect changing transportation patterns. By the late 1950s, the U.S. military had begun to build what is now the Queen's Highway. The Bahamian government later extended the road south and west into United Estates, and settlements shifted toward the road for easier access.

The first of these houses in many ways mirrors those on the ridge (see Figure 4). It is slightly deeper than Buildings 1 and 2, 6 meters by 4.5 meters and had a second structure, probably



Figure 4: Queen's Highway Building 1, Polly Hill Settlement

a large kitchen, behind it. This house is somewhat more elaborate, with a raised patio along the front and north side, mimicking the verandas on plantation houses, and a cistern (see Figure 5). Cisterns

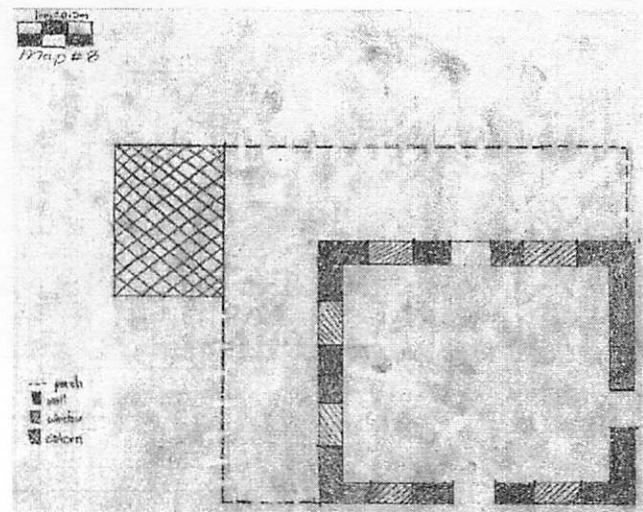


Figure 5: Queen's Highway Building 1, Polly Hill Settlement

have not been identified at any of the plantation sites, and may only become more common in the mid-twentieth century when shingle roofs were

introduced which allowed rainwater to be more easily collected (White 1985, 13).

Because this house was raised above ground level, it had a wooden floor, there is evidence that it was ceiled and not open to the rafters. This extensive use of wood suggests the greater availability of imported lumber (see Figure 6). Like its older neighbors on the hill, it does not appear to have had glass windows, but instead wooden shutters, and its greater depth allowed for two windows on the north side.



Figure 6: Queen's Highway Building 4, Polly Hill Settlement

The building behind the main structure was approximately the same size, but without verandas, was not raised above ground-level, and had a concrete floor. There is evidence of a large platform fireplace in the northwest corner. If this building served as the kitchen, it would also have provided space for eating and other household tasks, unlike the smaller open kitchen on the ridge. The concrete floor would have been a durable, easily cleaned workspace (see Figure 7).

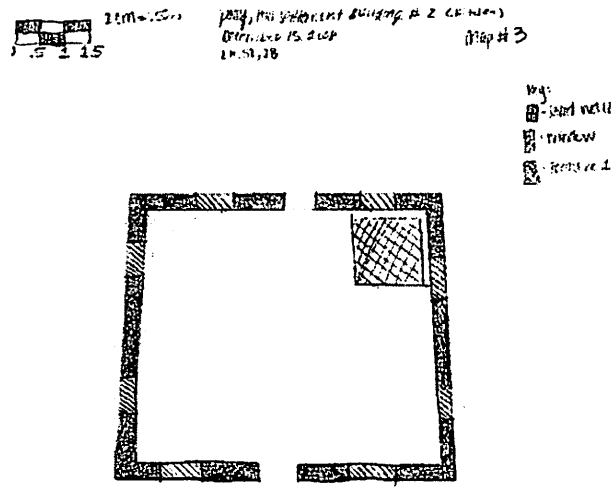


Figure 7: Queen's Highway Building 2, Kitchen, Polly Hill Settlement

Just south of this house lot was a second structure that differed greatly from any of the others at Polly Hill. Unlike the other houses which conformed closely to the standard San Salvador house with one room and balanced windows and doors, this house was a Palmdale-style house of the type that became popular in Nassau in the 1930s. The house had either two or three rooms with an interior front porch offset to one side. There was no evidence of a separate kitchen; cooking may have been done inside the house rather than outside. The construction was concrete on a cement slab with carefully molded posts and beams around the porch. The windows were much larger than the earlier houses and were probably glazed. This structure suggests the growing influence of Nassau after World War II, as local San Salvador house design was supplanted by outside influences. The house conforms not simply to San Salvador norms, but to middle-class urban expectations for house design (see figure 8).

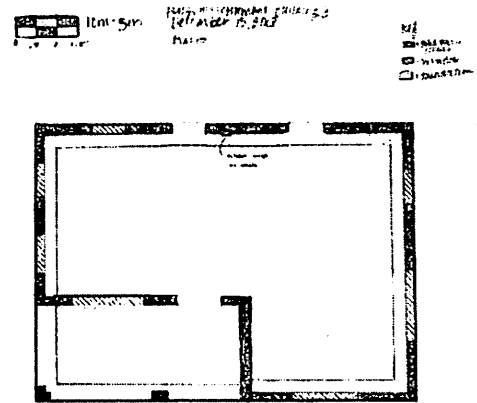


Figure 8: Queen's Highway Palmdale-style House

ARTIFACTS AND LIFEWAYS

In spite of the relative isolation of San Salvador in the early twentieth century, island residents did obtain goods from Nassau. Sam Edgcombe, who grew up in the 1920s, reported traveling to Nassau to visit relatives and buy clothes. Mabel Williams, who grew up in the 1930s, reported that her mother made clothes from purchased cloth and old flour sacks. Liquor was a popular commodity; rum, gin, and whisky was usually purchased in barrels, often directly from Jamaica. One-hundred to one-hundred fifty proof was preferred, which could be mixed with rain water. Bottled liquor was probably a luxury, but may have become more common after World War II (White 1985, 14, 20, 28, 42).

As part of the site survey, a garbage dump behind Ridge Building 1 was inventoried. The dump included large numbers of intact artifacts, mostly glass bottles. All of these items would have been imported to San Salvador and show ongoing economic exchanges with the economy outside the island. A breakdown of the items is below:

Table
Dump Inventory
Building 1
Polly Hill Ridge Settlement

Liquor Bottles	31
Soda Bottles	10
Juice & Milk Bottles	2
<i>Beverage Bottles Sub- total</i>	<i>43</i>
Food Containers	4
Baby Food	2
Tablewares	2
Lamp Chimney	1
Medicinal	2
Cosmetics	3
Shoes	4
Iron Stove or Kettle	1
Batteries	3
<i>Total</i>	<i>65</i>

The majority of the items recovered probably date from the 1960s, near the end of the house occupation. Most of the items from the dump were some type of beverage bottle. Only four food containers were recovered. This agrees with oral histories of the mid-twentieth century that report that island residents grew most of their own food, including Indian corn, pigeon peas, potatoes, yams, okra watermelons, muskmelons, and sour oranges. They reported raising goats, sheep, cattle, chickens and fishing for a wide variety of seafood, but no faunal remains were found at Polly Hill Settlement. The traditional Bahamian food preparation involved an iron kettle placed over a fire on a platform fireplace (White 1985, 8, 14, 29). The relatively lack of medicine bottles is also reflected in oral histories which report that bush medicine was preferred to imported medicines.

Some luxury items were recovered, including a Palmolive aftershave lotion bottle, fragments from a Noxema jar, and a plastic cap from a Jergens bottle. Clearly some imported cosmetics were beginning to replace traditional island products. Two baby food containers suggest that prepared children's products may also have become available on the island by the 1960s. Three batteries were recovered, signaling that small appliances such as radios were in use at the site. In addition to the liquor bottles, a collection of small, 8 oz. soda bottles was recovered: two Coca-Cola, two 7-Up, and six Cliquot Club. One milk bottle was an important reminder that bottles may have arrived on the island without their original contents. The only ceramic was from a mustard pot. No plates or glasses were found, which may suggest that wooden plates may have remained a norm into the 1960s (Bertram Forbes 2004). Fragments of a glass pitcher and a glass vase were recovered.

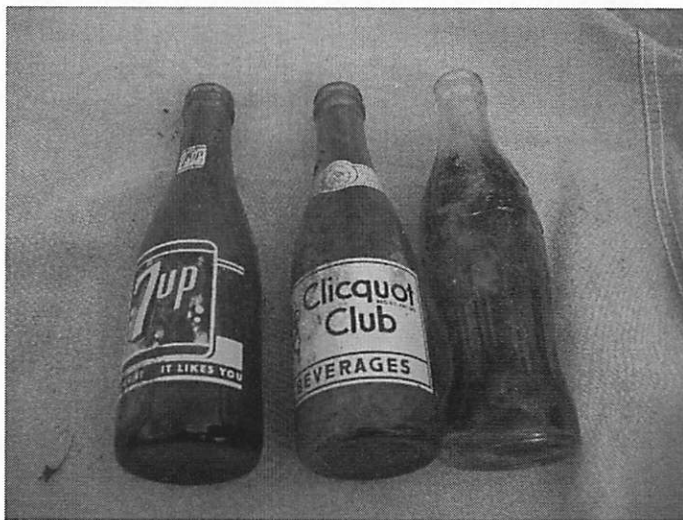


Figure 9: Soda Bottles

Where maker's marks could be identified, the origins of the bottles could be determined. Liquor bottles included two Gordon's Gin bottles from England, one from United Glass in Scotland, one from Trinidad intended for the U.S. market, one from Canada, and one made by the Hazel Glass Company of Wheeling, West Virginia. One of the two wine bottles was manufactured by the Amberger Floschenhalter Company of Amberg,

Germany, which must have been a special present for the household. In contrast to the liquor bottles, all the soda bottles were manufactured in the United States. Of the unidentified beverage containers, one was from Canada and one from the United States. Overall, the assemblage shows that while island residents purchased a fairly narrow set of goods from outside the island, they did participate in a global economy, with items manufactured in the Caribbean, North America and Europe appearing among the goods.

CONCLUSIONS

The survey at Polly Hill Settlement captures life on San Salvador at an important transition period. Before World War II, San Salvador remained a relatively isolated island. Out-migration for greater economic opportunity was common, and subsistence farming combined with limited cash crops provided a basic living for island residents (Shaklee 2009, 28). The earlier houses on the ridge reflect longstanding Bahamian house traditions from this pre-World War II period. Each is a single-room dwelling facing the water with a separate kitchen behind the structure. Windows were left unglazed and probably originally had wooden shutters; roofs were thatched. The houses by the Queen's Highway, built several decades later, reflect the changes introduced to the island after World War II with the arrival of U.S. military bases and greater economic opportunity. In one case, this later house was an elaboration of traditional norms, slightly larger, with a shingled roof, raised foundation, cistern, and verandas. In the other case, a new architectural form not traditional to the island was introduced; the use of cement and Palmdale-style designs reflect increased connections to Nassau and cultural influences outside San Salvador.

Similarly, the artifacts from the 1960s also show the increased economic connection between San Salvador and the outside world. The types of artifacts remain relatively limited; island residents continued to eat local foodstuffs, rely on bush medicine, and use native materials for tablewares, including plates and glasses. At the same time residents reached beyond the island and seemed to

prefer various types of imported beverages. Large numbers of liquor bottles also were found at the early twentieth-century tenant farm at Polly Hill Plantation, but at Polly Hill Settlement we recovered soda containers as well. The residents at Building 1 also began to use imported cosmetics. Polly Hill Settlement was largely abandoned by the 1990s, except for Bernie Storr's home and store. Opportunities in Cockburn Town, including Club Med and Riding Rock Inn, have drawn island residents away from the east-side settlements (Shaklee 2009, 57). But at Polly Hill Settlement we can see the seeds of contemporary Out Island life, combining traditional Bahamian lifeways with increased access to, and participation in, a global economy and culture.

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