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**FARQUHARSON'S JOURNAL REVISITED:  
A MATERIAL CULTURE ANALYSIS OF PLANTATION LIFE**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper re-examines Charles Farquharson's plantation journal in light of DePaul's 2009 and 2010 archaeological investigation at Prospect Hill Plantation. Because it is the only extent Bahamian journal of an Out Island planter during the plantation period, the journal has been used extensively by historians and anthropologists. The journal has been used to understand slave life, work schedules, and planter activities on Out Islands. This analysis is slightly different. It looks at how Farquharson's Journal can be used to understand and interpret the material culture of Prospect Hill Plantation, including building construction and use, farming and field work, and plantation interactions.

**INTRODUCTION**

Charles Farquharson's Journal of 1831-2 is the only diary of an Out Island planter from the pre-1834 plantation period. As such, it has been one of the most closely studied textual sources on Bahamian plantation agriculture, the planter aristocracy, and slave life. The most thorough analysis of the journal was made by Michael Craton and Gail Saunders in *Islanders in the Stream* (1992). Craton and Saunders were particularly interested in using the Journal to understand the dynamics of the slave plantation, including work patterns and master-slave interactions. But the journal also sheds a great deal of information on the physical appearance of the plantation itself.

In my examination of the journal, I choose to take a different approach and use the journal to better understand the material culture of Prospect Hill as it existed at the end of the slavery period. My approach has been to look for insights into the plantation landscape, buildings and material objects used at the plantation and to better understand the connections among plantations on San Salvador and between the San Salvador and the outside world.<sup>1</sup>

**CHARLES FARQUHARSON  
AND PROSPECT HILL**

Prospect Hill is one of at least eight, and probably more, plantations established on San Salvador between 1780 and 1834. Charles Farquharson was born in Scotland in 1760 and unlike many of his neighbors, was not a Loyalist, but came directly from Scotland, probably lured by the opportunities of staple crop agriculture in this emerging colony. He received his first land grant of 200 acres on San Salvador in 1803, eventually amassing 1,500 acres by his death in 1835. By the 1820s he had married Kitty Dixon, a free mulatto and mother of John Dixon of Dixon Hill Plantation. Farquharson was survived by at least two of his children with Kitty Dixon, but four others, perhaps the children of his first wife, and his chief superintendent died in the wreck of the schooner, *Eleanor*, in 1824 (Burton and Baxter 2007, Craton and Saunders 1992).

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<sup>1</sup> All citations and references are to the published edition of Farquharson's Journal (Farquharson 1957).

Craton and Saunders note that Charles Farquharson was atypical for Out Island slave masters, remaining on his plantation rather than moving to Nassau and utilizing overseers, leaving him largely isolated from the white planter community, except for twice-yearly trips to the capital. Although his personal possessions seem to be limited, he did surround himself with the trappings of the planter. From his will we know he had a mahogany table, sofa, and sideboard, a dozen chairs, some silverware, glass, and books, all of which must have been in marked contrast with the furnishing of the slave cabins. As the island's only white resident through much of the 1820s and 1830s, he served as Justice of the Peace and its primary conduit to colonial authorities in Nassau (Craton and Saunders 1992).

By the 1820s and 1830s raising stock had largely replaced cotton as the chief export crop, although subsistence farming was the main work on the plantations. In spite of declines in economic opportunity for the slave owners, slaves had relatively healthy lifestyles with significant demographic growth during the decade leading up to Emancipation. Family formation and social bonds within slave communities were relatively strong, but with a limited planter class, both by numbers and by race, significant accommodation was necessary between planters and slaves to run the plantations effectively. In the absence of significant accommodation by the "masters", slave unrest seemed not only possible, but probable (Gerace 1982, 1987, Craton and Saunders 1992, chapter 16, Burton 2004, 2005).

We also know something of the slave residents at Prospect Hill. Of Farquharson's thirty-five slaves in 1822, 37 percent were African-born, and 49 percent were under the age of twenty. The plantation had a strong family structure; only four of the African-born slaves lived outside a family unit. By 1834, the slave population had grown to fifty-two, the growth mostly due to natural increase; purchases and sales had left a net increase of one. Four of the nine slaves who died during the period were under the age of three. These numbers do not suggest a high rate of infant mortality: however,

twenty-five children were born and survived. One young slave, an infant mulatto girl, perhaps the daughter of one of the Farquharsons, was manumitted in 1824. The percentage of African-born slaves had declined to 19 percent. Five households could be identified in the 1822 register and although the 1834 register showed more single individuals, Craton and Saunders suggest this may have represented separate housing by sex for older children and young adults rather than an actual breakdown in family structure.<sup>2</sup>

African marriage practices survived and at least one polygamous household, composed of Alick and his two wives, was present at the plantation. Farquharson appears to have been supportive of slave marriages and on at least one occasion sent one of his slaves to live at Dixon Plantation "to work and be the wife for his Cuffey as it appears she is already with child for Cuffey." If all the extent slave quarters were standing in 1834, these 52 slaves were housed in 15 slave dwellings, a little over 3 slaves to a dwelling. More likely, not all of the buildings were in use at the same time.

#### FARQUHARSON'S JOURNAL

The journal itself is a rare survivor. Most plantation records from the slavery period have been lost, either left behind when plantations were abandoned by their planters, or discarded by later descendants. Farquharson's Journal was somehow preserved through the nineteenth century and was discovered in 1903 on San Salvador by the Assistant Island Commissioner, Ormond McDonald, who made a transcription. In

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<sup>2</sup> There also seems to have been a pattern of listing recently-born slave children at the end of the slave register. This discussion of the Farquharson's slave community is drawn from Craton and Saunders analysis in *Islanders*, ch. 18. Kathy Gerace reviewed the material remains of Farquharson's Plantation, Sandy Point, and Fortune Hill Plantations in "Three Loyalist Plantations on San Salvador, Bahamas," *The Florida Anthropologist* 35 (December 1982):4; Kathy Gerace, "Early Nineteenth Century Plantations on San Salvador, Bahamas: The Archaeological Record," *The Journal of The Bahamas Historical Society*, 9 (1987):14-21.

1957, this transcription was published by the Alfred Deans Peggs as *A Relic of Slavery: Farquharson's Journal for 1831-2*. Both the original journal and the transcription are now in the Department of Archives, The Bahamas, in Nassau. Other records of Prospect Hill Plantation were collected and maintained by the later owners of the plantation, the O'Brien Family, and now make up the O'Brien Papers, also in the Department of Archives, The Bahamas (Craton and Saunders 1992, p. 433, Farquharson 1957).

#### FARQUHARSON'S JOURNAL AND THE LANDSCAPE OF PROSPECT HILL

Charles Farquharson moved through a slave plantation landscape at its ultimate development. Only two years after the last entry in the journal, the British proclaimed gradual emancipation throughout the British Empire. Overall, Charles Farquharson saw the landscape as one transformed from its wild natural condition to one regulated and controlled by the plantation owner. Farquharson consistently referred to places in the landscape by plantation functions, such as fields, roads, and buildings, and rarely by natural features. On the rare occasions when natural terms appeared, like the "cave hole," this natural feature had done serious injury to one of Farquharson's horses.

Farquharson, along with his slaves, was engaged in an unending battle to keep the natural landscape at bay, and to preserve his physical hegemony over the land, and much of the work of the plantation slaves involved weeding and burning brush, not only in the fields, but also on roads and around the plantation yard and buildings.

Naming features in the landscape is one of the first steps to claiming them. In the case of Charles Farquharson, this drive for control was conducted jointly with his slaves. Fields were not only named for the products grown in them that benefited the planter, the "Old Cotton field" for example, but also for both slave men and women on the plantation. The legacy of cotton remained in the nomenclature of the fields, Old

Cotton, New Cotton, and Blanket Fields, even when these fields increasingly grew the food crops more important for the survival of the plantation residents.

Order was imposed on this landscape by a series of slave-built walls and fences. The stone walls survive on many Bahamian plantations sites to this day, but wooden fences, some made out of tree stumps, also delineated fields, work and living spaces. Maintenance on these walls and fences took place throughout the year. This sense of order, however, did not extend to a modern sense of single-crop fields. Although the main fields each seemed to have a primary crop, other crops might be planted among more established plants, guinea corn for example, among cotton bushes.

Table 1  
Examples of Field Names

Corn House Field  
Harcules Field  
Blanket Field  
Big Field  
Maria's Field  
Old Cotton Field  
New Cotton Field

Farquharson's vision seemed to largely end at his plantation walls. Although he discussed other plantations, he did not seem to have ventured often into the brush that probably surrounded his fields and yard. His primary point of egress from the plantation was the "public road" which ran along the east side of the island and connected Prospect Hill to Kerr Mount, his secondary plantation, and to other plantations on San Salvador. Farquharson himself only occasionally left the plantation. Farquharson's age, over fifty, probably reduced his visits to neighboring planters, although John Dixon, of Dixon Hill Plantation, was mentioned as a regular visitor to Prospect Hill. Farquharson's slaves seemed to have left the plantation more frequently, to work for neighboring planters and to attend social events and slave funerals. On a day-to-day basis, slaves, as

messengers, probably crossed plantation boundaries far more often than did the planters themselves.

### PLANTATION BUILDINGS AND THE JOURNAL

Farquharson viewed buildings on his plantation as falling into two broad categories: work buildings and residential spaces. Farquharson noted his own house, his wife's shed, a cotton house, and various slave dwellings at both Prospect Hill and Kerr Mount. Although he mentioned owning five horses and at least one mule, he did not discuss a stable nor did he talk about a kitchen, both buildings that existed at the plantation. Everything on the plantation, of course, belonged to Farquharson, and he usually referred to slave dwellings generically as "Negroe Houses," although occasionally houses, like fields, were attributed to a specific slave, like "William's House" although whether William was the original or current occupant, or perhaps the builder, is unknown.

Table 2  
Examples of Building Names

Dwelling House  
William's House  
Maria's House  
Dennis House  
Negroe House (at Kerr Mount)  
Gin Circle  
Mistress's Shad  
Cotton House

Buildings were primarily mentioned as structures to maintain, much like walls and fields. This relatively heavy commitment to maintenance suggests that buildings would have been used intensely. Houses were all thatched and repairing and replacing their roofs appears to be a major activity. Although both men and women worked in the fields, thatching, like wall construction, appears to have been exclusively a male occupation. The interior walls of even the slave houses were plastered and re-plastering

was required at least on occasion. Work buildings, including the ginning circle, were also thatched, and these shaded work areas provided a respite from the sun of field work.

Residential buildings appear to have been differentiated from work buildings by being white washed, both outside and inside, probably an annual event. Farquharson did not mention building any new buildings, so construction probably was completed at the plantation by the 1830s.

We know something about the furnishings of Farquharson's house from his will and probate. In addition to the furniture mentioned in those sources, a mahogany table, sofa, and sideboard, a dozen chairs, the journal mentions Farquharson getting a "chist of drawers" from Sandy Point plantation, probably not made of mahogany, so not valuable enough to appear on his estate inventory. He reports no additional furniture acquisitions (Craton and Saunders 1992).

### THE MOVEMENT OF MATERIAL GOODS AND TRADE

Farquharson's Journal also provides insights into the kinds of material goods both exported from and imported to the island. Ships arrived on the island about every three months to pick up goods for sale in Nassau. Livestock and produce were the primary exports. Farquharson continued to ship small amounts of cotton from the plantation which was stuffed into bags for shipment. Livestock included cows, sheep, and turkeys, and the journal mentions some oranges being shipped to Nassau. On at least two occasions he shipped out lignum vitae wood. These goods were collected from both Prospect Hill and Kerr Mount Plantations and then sent to French Bay to be loaded onto small craft for the journey to Nassau.

In return for these exports, Farquharson purchased various consumer goods, including "flour," certainly wheat flour, cloth for slave clothing, and "some other articles." Farquharson also regularly received letters and correspondence by boat. These same vessels provided

transport for the planter, his luggage and “beds,” probably mattresses or bedding, when he travelled to Nassau. After each trip he returned with his “luggage” probably including unnamed goods purchased in Nassau.

Wrecking provided another venue for goods to arrive on San Salvador from the outside, although only some rope was reported as salvaged from the one wreck that occurred during the journal’s accounting. Artifact remains at Farquharson’s plantation show that liquor, particularly gin, and medicinals were all probably regular imports to the island,

The various plantations on the island probably produced similar products, and beyond the purchase of a chest of drawers from Prince Storr at Sandy Point, Farquharson does not mention trading goods with his neighbors. Planters frequently traded the labor of their slaves, however, and sent slaves to work on neighboring plantations in return for work done at the home plantation. Similarly, horses and mules would be loaned out to neighbors when needed. Slaves possibly moved material goods informally between plantations, but there does not appear to have been a formal intra-island trading network.

#### MATERIAL CULTURE OF PROSPECT HILL TODAY

Vestiges of the material culture recorded by Charles Farquharson exist at the plantation site today. While the site is now covered in scrub, in the nineteenth century, the landscape was tamed and visually would have been open and clear. Plantation walls still riddle the site and demarcate the inner yard, slave quarters, and various fields. This network of walls was central to marking Farquharson’s ownership and control of his landscape. These walls not only divided the landscape into various uses, they also separated peoples, the planter family and the slaves for example. Although the plantation was all owned by Farquharson, smaller fields were controlled by slaves. Untangling the meaning of these walls can be difficult today, but the Journal provides an insight into how one planter viewed his overall landscape. No matter how

well developed Prospect Hill was itself, the world beyond the plantation remained for Farquharson a hostile and dangerous place, even thirty years after settlement.

Similarly, while remains of many of the buildings exist at Prospect Hill, often it is difficult to equate Farquharson’s references to existing structures. The cotton house and Mrs. Farquharson’s shed cannot be clearly identified, but the Manor House can. The existing material remains show that except for its scale, Farquharson’s house would not have been markedly different in external appearance from the slave quarters. The Manor House at Prospect Hill was a low, one story building, unlike other planter homes that were usually two stories. Both the master and slave dwellings were thatched. What would have been distinctive about the planter’s home were its internal possessions, fine mahogany furniture and silver.

Today, it is easy to give various buildings at the site equal importance. But for nineteenth-century planters, the landscape was filled with hierarchies that mirrored the master-slave relationship. According to the Journal, some buildings were central to Farquharson’s existence, the Manor House for example, while others were relatively unimportant, like the kitchen or stables. Buildings where slaves worked were less important than the work that slaves did in them. Although Farquharson would have seen these buildings on a daily basis, he was blind to them beyond the work and possessions they contained.

Farquharson’s Journal is also an important reminder that San Salvador was actually an interconnected landscape with people and possessions moving from plantation to plantation, not a series of discrete sites. Roads connected the primary plantations and both planters and their slaves crossed the undeveloped areas of the island to visit neighbors, conduct economic exchanges, and perform the rituals of life and death. Given his age, Farquharson was more often visited, rather than a visitor, so he does not himself capture the larger material vision of the island, but he does reference it.

## CONCLUSIONS

Farquharson's Journal provides important insights into how Charles Farquharson viewed the landscape around him. At least some of the features he identified can be connected to extent remains on the plantation side today. But simply connecting the buildings and fields he mentioned to ruins at the plantation today misses the real utility of the journal for understanding the material culture of Prospect Hill. More important is the worldview of the planter that the journal provides. Charles Farquharson saw the landscape as something to be controlled and transformed from the natural environment around him, through the removal of natural vegetation, naming physical features, and constructing plantation walls and buildings to define the use of the land. To a degree, master and slaves were a team creating an oasis of civilization within a raw and dangerous natural setting. Similarly, plantation masters and their slaves moved across the island, each plantation becoming a separate community in the human landscape of the island. The archaeological remains we find today do help us to understand how people lived in the past, but they can also provide insights into people's attitudes, beliefs and fears; Farquharson's journal can be a key to unlocking those insights.

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