

COMMENTS ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTANT WORK AT “THE OUTPOST” TRACT, ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA

By Marsha A. Chance, M.A.

With Contributions by Greg C. Smith, PhD., RPA

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The goal of this summary is to discuss archaeological and historical resources as well as previous investigations and research pertaining to the tract known as “The Outpost,” or “Vista Tranquila.” Consisting of approximately 103 acres, the property lies in Section 52 of the Mickler Landing USGS Quadrangle map, and is an outparcel within the Guana River Wildlife Management Area.

Four archaeological investigations have been conducted within the tract, resulting in four reports. They were carried out between 2014 and 2017. Florida Archaeological Services, Inc. (FAS) (Johnson 2014) was followed by Environmental Services, Inc. (ESI) in 2015 (Handley), 2016 (Handley, Newman, and Floyd), and 2017 (Handley). State and County regulations require that certain methods of fieldwork be utilized during professional surveys and excavations, and also that specific types of information be included in the reports, based upon historical contexts and archaeological research. The field methods used during each of the surveys and excavations were adequate. Surveys consisted of shovel testing at 25 or 50 meter intervals throughout upland portions of the property, and these met State and County requirements for survey level field investigations. Subsequently, excavations were conducted within the identified areas of artifact concentration. A few subsurface features were found, and all of the cultural material recovered dated to prehistoric times when Native Americans populated the area. The features and cultural material recovered in the study tract are thought to relate to the nearby Mabry Mound and a surrounding prehistoric village site (8SJ14) that lie approximately 1000 feet north of the project area, though little in-depth discussion of this connection is contained in the excavation report (Handley, Newman, and Floyd 2016). Testing and excavations took place in or near Mabry Mound in 1996, 1997 and 2001.

During the course of survey and excavation within the current study area, six archaeological sites were recorded (8SJ6440, 6441, 6529, 6530, 6531, and 6532). Sites 6440 and 6441 were further tested, and site 8SJ6441 was determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. As a result, site 6441 was subjected to formal Phase III excavations, which accomplished site mitigation prior to development. The reports on work within the tract were deemed acceptable by the State and County review agencies.

However, State and County sufficiency requirements are quite specific regarding the elements that must be included in each report, and these were not met in regard to British Period history in the vicinity, or to related prehistoric sites in the area and their contributions to our understanding of prehistory. The Sufficiency Checklist for archaeological and historical report review, in accordance with Chapter 1A-46 of the Florida Administrative Code includes the following requirements.

(b) Archival research shall address: [1] past field surveys in the project area and the relevance of the major findings to the area currently under study; and a ... [2] chronologically arranged narrative of the prehistory and history of the project area and the significant historical events or developments (including important individuals and institutions) which are necessary to place sites and properties in historic contexts within the project area.

(f) The description of the results and conclusions of the archaeological resource investigations shall address: [3] conclusions and analysis of the findings, including a discussion on how the findings contribute to an understanding of the past.

The Compliance and Review Section of the Florida Division of Cultural Resources reviews such reports, as does the St. Johns County Cultural Resources Coordinator. In addition, the County Cultural Resources Coordinator has designated the vicinity of Neck Road and the proposed outpost development as a “sensitive area,” in terms of the multiple archaeological and historical resources that characterize the vicinity.

The standard approach to the first requirement is to discuss how the project surveys and recorded sites relate to previously recorded nearby surveys and sites. Three projects have previously been conducted along Neck Road, north of the Outpost tract (Ashley and Smith 1996; Dickinson and Wayne 1997; Smith and Handley 2001). The first, completed in 1996, and the third, completed in 2001, were actually projects conducted by ESI, the second cultural resource consulting firm utilized at the Outpost tract. Neither of these reports were cited, nor were their findings discussed in the three reports produced by ESI on work at the Outpost. The Southarc project (1997) was a large-scale investigation of the Mabry Mound site (8SJ14). It was listed in identical tables in Handley (2015) and Handley, Newman and Floyd (2016) but not fully discussed in the consultants’ reports.

The standard approach to the second checklist requirement is to include a chapter on Cultural History in each report that outlines and discusses the sequence of prehistoric and historic periods pertinent to the project tract and its surroundings. For example, in this case the prehistoric Mabry Mound (site 8SJ14, located approximately 1000 feet north of the outpost) and other nearby historic archaeological sites should have been cited and discussed, along with discussion of historic research that is pertinent to understanding human land use in the project area. The most significant and pertinent historical data (as opposed to prehistoric) associated with the Outpost tract concerns the Mount Pleasant Plantation, established by Governor James Grant (Shafer 2000). This plantation was a key element of the historic British presence in the project vicinity.

In 1780, Governor James Grant, the first British Governor of East Florida, undertook, through the actions of his Florida employees, the development of a plantation that came to be known as “Mount Pleasant Plantation.” It was located approximately fifteen miles north of his first plantation on the Guana River, known as “Grant’s Villa.” Grant, one of three consecutive governors during the British Period, had left St. Augustine for England in 1771, but continued to supervise his agricultural enterprises from afar. At Grant’s Villa, now lying within Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve (GTMNERR), the main crop was indigo, which rapidly depleted the soil. Hence, a second plantation was developed to grow not only indigo, but rice and other crops. Both plantations were bisected by a road, along which slaves lived. Today a fragment of this road occurs as Neck Road, which

extends southward from Mickler Road. In 1781, sixty-seven slaves owned by Grant were inventoried at Grant's Villa, many of whom later moved northward to Mount Pleasant.

The story of Grant's agricultural undertakings was summarized by Daniel L. Schafer, PhD. (2000) in a volume of *El Escribano*, a history journal published by the St. Augustine Historical Society. The entire volume is entitled, "Governor James Grant's Villa: A British East Florida Indigo Plantatio.". It contains images of maps of each of the plantations, which were prepared by Benjamin Lord, Surveyor General of East Florida, in 1783. The map of Mount Pleasant, bounded on the north by Mickler Road, depicts many constructed features of the plantation, including a set of dams and floodgates associated with rice cultivation, other agricultural fields, houses and offices, Mabry Mound (Indian Tumulus), gardens, orange groves, and other outbuildings (Appendix A). Thirty-seven "Negro Houses" are depicted along today's Neck Road. The road afforded travel between Grant's two plantations. According to Schafer, the entire length of the road could still be traveled as of 2000.

Although the requirements of State and County review agencies mandate that the cultural history of a study area and vicinity be included in the final reports submitted for review, only one of the four reports prepared for the Outpost/Vista Tranquila property contains historical information on the Mount Pleasant Plantation. It is not acknowledged that the Outpost tract boundaries may overlap with, or abut, those of the historical plantation. In the FAS chapter on Cultural History, the author mentions the Sanchez Grant, which was south of the Mount Pleasant Plantation, citing that the Outpost tract lies within the Sanchez Grant boundaries. If this is correct, it is still the case that Mount Pleasant features may lie at the northeast corner of the Outpost tract, as discussed below. The Sanchez tract appears to never have been developed as a plantation.

While the Environmental Services, Inc. (ESI) 2015 and 2016 reports contain chapters entitled "Cultural History Specific to the Project Area," the last subtitle within the chapter is about the Contact and Mission Periods (1565 to the late 17th century). Neither the Sanchez Grant, the British Period, nor Grant's plantations and their features are included in this Cultural History. One sentence in the "Previous Research" chapters contains two vague sentences, as follows. "Most of the sites nearby are historic period sites, ranging from the 18th to the 20th century. To the north and south nearly half a mile from the current study area were sites associated with the British Period, more specifically, Governor Grant's plantation." These sentences follow Table 3.1 which shows that four sites, in addition to the Mabry Mound and village site, contained historic material. However, no additional information about the sites is in the reports. Upon looking them up in the Florida Master Site File, it was found that site 8SJ3254 is a dike thought to date to British times, which lies one quarter mile south of the Outpost tract, while site 8SJ4879, recorded by ESI (Smith and Handley, 2001), is about one quarter mile north of the Outpost tract. It contained historical artifacts as well as a portion of one of the Mount Pleasant Plantation dams. In addition, the reports do not contain any mention of searching for historical features associated with either of the plantations. The original archaeological survey was based solely upon testing at 25 and 50 meter intervals (82 and 164 feet), which could easily have overlooked historical artifacts and features. In addition, there is no mention of the historic road that crossed the Outpost tract, relative to its historic significance. Historical roadways are supposed to be recorded as historic sites, even if they are only faintly present.

If the historic map of Mount Pleasant is reduced to approximately the same scale as the USGS quadrangle map showing the Outpost parcel location, the locations of Mickler Road, Neck Road, and the

Mabry Mound can be exactly matched. Unfortunately, the historic map does not have a scale, hence no precise measurements are possible. Using this method, it appears that the “Great Lower Dam” cited by Schafer (2000) existed either within the Outpost boundaries, or right at the Outpost boundary. Six water control dams were built in the 1780s to block brackish water from Grant’s rice fields. Four other east/west dams were built farther north, with a single north/south dam extending the length of the rice fields. All are shown on the 1783 map of Mount Pleasant (Appendix A). Using this method of matching the maps, the dam appears to have extended across the northern, upland portion of the tract.

In 2001, an owner of property along Neck Road stated that a vestige of one of the dams had been discovered at the northeast corner of the River Oaks development on Neck Road, north of the Outpost tract (Smith and Handley 2001). In conjunction with that project, a scatter of historic artifacts and a portion of the aforementioned dike (dam) were recorded as site 8SJ4879. The dam had been damaged by heavy equipment and the remaining piece was in the adjacent wetland. If the Outpost boundaries are laid over the historic map, it is clear that this vestige would have been part of the second dam located north of the Great Lower Dam, and that the Great Lower Dam commenced near the northern boundary of the Outpost tract. In 1982, Schafer searched for the lower dam with two men who grew up on Neck Road, and had crossed the dam on foot when they were boys. In 2000, Schafer stated that the lower dam was still submerged within the cattails, and was located approximately “adjacent to and east of the point on Neck Road where public access ends.” The northern boundary of the Outpost property is where public access ends. Thus, it may well be that the location of the end of the dam is either within or at the edge of the Outpost project boundaries. In addition, a carved wooden floodgate was associated with the lower dam, and both were visible in the early 20th century, according to Schafer. He speculated that the dams and floodgates might be found through the use of aerial photographs, rare maps, and satellite based technology. A cursory look at a 1942 aerial photograph of the area does reveal an east-west linear feature in the expected location of the Great Lower Dam, as well as a north-south linear feature conforming to the location of Grant’s north-south dam. It lies in the wetland east of the Outpost tract and Neck Road. The linear feature is also visible on Figure 5.1 of the 2015 ESI report (Handley 2015), though it is not cited or discussed in the text.

While the lack of a scale on the historic map is problematic, it does seem clear that part of the remains of the Great Lower Dam may lie within the Outpost Tract, near the northeast corner. Other elements of the Mount Pleasant Plantation may also be within the tract, perhaps in areas between the 25 and 50 meter shovel test intervals used by the consultants. According to the cultural resource consultants’ four reports, very minor background research on Governor Grant, Mount Pleasant Plantation, or any known plantation elements, was conducted for the Outpost project, and no effort was made to search for the historical dam and gate features discussed above. No effort was made to investigate the possibility of Mount Pleasant Plantation features within the tract. The history of Governor Grant’s agricultural activities is an important part of the history of St. Johns County and the City of St. Augustine, the oldest continuously occupied city in the United States.

Further, site 8SJ6441 contained potentially significant cultural data that was not developed to meet the checklist requirement that conclusions and analysis include a discussion of how the findings contribute to an understanding of the past. The relationship between the contents of the Mabry Mound site (8SJ14) and that of the two nearby sites recorded within the Outpost tract (8SJ6440 and 6441) is not adequately discussed in the excavation report (Handley, Newman, and Floyd 2016). The interpretation of site 8SJ6441 does not make connections with the Mabry Mound regarding contemporaneity, artifact

types, subsurface feature types, subsistence, resource utilization, settlement patterns, site purpose, or periods of site usage.

Thus, the consultants' reports did not actually meet State and County standards. They did not contain evidence of background research on the significant British history of the immediate area, nor of a field search for the Great Lower Dam and gate, or other historic plantation elements, including the roadway. In addition, there was no discussion of how findings in the prehistoric sites within the tract relate to other nearby sites or how they contribute to our understanding of prehistoric lifeways.

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n.d. Aerial photographs of St. Johns County, Flight 3C (1942), Tile 92. George A. Smathers Libraries. ufdc.ufl.edu. Gainesville.

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A – Plan of Mount Pleasant Plantation, 1783

Appendix B – Aerial Photograph, 1942