



United States
Department of Defense
Legacy Resource Management Program

Argyle
Colonial Fort on the Ogeechee



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Authored by

Daniel T. Elliott

With contributions by

Rita Folse Elliott, Joel L. Jones, and Kathleen Mulchrone

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Lieutenant Colonel Carey W. Brown, Director, Public Works

David McKivergan, Consulting Archaeologist through Bregman and Company, Fort Stewart's
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The Rangers at Fort Argyle

WHO WERE THE GEORGIA RANGERS?

Argyle was a Ranger fort, and in the popular mind the word *Ranger* evokes a montage of images. Some may envision a band of hearty rogues in buckskins like Robert Rogers' Rangers prowling the wooded hills of New England. To others it evokes visions of Vietnam-era commandos parachuting in shiny black boots, or frantic parents scouring the mall on Christmas Eve for that 'gotta-have-it' plastic superhero action figure. Of course there are Darby's Rangers, Texas Rangers, the Lone Ranger, and the New York Rangers hockey team—all of which are a part of American lore. The word ranger has become a seminal part of our everyday life, but it is not one that people normally associate with Georgia. This report examines the lives and times of the Georgia Rangers, who were practicing ranger warfare tactics decades before Robert Rogers' troop.

Rangers were by no means restricted to the northeastern colonies during the colonial period. The English Rangers were fundamental to the survival and protection of South Carolina and Georgia throughout the colonial period. Rangers were used by South Carolina during the Yamasee War in the decades before Georgia's founding. *The* strategy of using Rangers to patrol the frontier was a successful one, which was incorporated into Georgia's defenses from the onset. Nowhere was their presence more manifest than at Fort Argyle on the Ogeechee River. This study attempts to render these important historical figures less obscure in the public mind.

Rangers traveled light and comfortably. They were usually mounted on horses, but they were equally skilled on foot and at rowing or sailing boats. The uniform of the Georgia Rangers and the earlier South Carolina Rangers is not completely known. A few of the Rangers wore leather shoes with fancy brass buckles and coats with plain brass buckles. They wore military hats and warm watchcoats. They may have worn parts of the uniform of Brigadier General James Edward Oglethorpe's 42nd Regiment of Foot, which included a red-colored coat with olive green trim, similar to that shown in Figure 1. Gone were many of the elaborate trappings that characterized much of the elite British society. The Ranger probably had two flintlock weapons, a pistol and a small carbine. A powderhorn, a small pack, cartouch (cartridge) box, and a blanket rounded out the Ranger's field gear.

Since, by definition, Rangers patrolled the range between settlements, the resident population at Fort Argyle fluctuated markedly during its lifetime. Aside from the provincial Rangers that were garrisoned at the fort, a support contingent of the Trustee's servants and possibly soldier's wives resided there as well. When two vicious outlaws went to Fort Argyle and attacked a servant family in September, 1740, an event that is documented in the colonial records, the fort was apparently unguarded by the Rangers and the fort was easily penetrated. Appendix 1 contains a list of people who our research has shown, stayed at Fort Argyle from 1733 to 1767. Perhaps one of your ancestors was among them!

The commanders of Fort Argyle included James McPherson, Lachlan McIntosh, Thomas Jones, John Milledge, and possibly others. The first two commanders, McPherson and McIntosh, were seasoned Scottish Rangers from South Carolina; Thomas Jones was of mixed British and Native American ancestry; and John Milledge was from England. The commander with the most seniority was Captain Milledge, who served throughout King George's War and the French and Indian War. He later went on to be a politician. In the hierarchy below the Captains were the Lieutenants, Quartermaster, Surgeon, Cornet, Drummer, Cadets (officers in training), Corporals, and, finally, the lowly Privates.

Fort Argyle had several Lieutenants who were capable of taking command of the fort in the Captain's absence. The most colorful of these was Moses Nunez Rivers. Moses was a Portuguese Jew, who worked for

a while as a fur and deerskin trader among the Tuckabatchees-an Upper Creek tribe in Alabama. Oglethorpe trusted Nunez and sent him to Virginia to enlist Ranger recruits



Figure 1. Uniform of the 42nd Regiment of Foot, 1742.

during King George's War. Lieutenant Nunez became fluent in the southeastern Native American languages and became invaluable as an interpreter at important treaty talks.

Lower-ranking officers shared a variety of duties. The quartermaster had the job of supplying the Rangers with food and other supplies. The surgeon met the medical needs of the Ranger troop. The comet, a rank that has since been replaced by second lieutenant, was the standard bearer for the Ranger troop. Corporals, who were noncommissioned officers, were in charge of a small group of Rangers. The drummer, which was a commissioned rank, was Thomas Grey for most of the fort's history. Thomas Grey's drumbeats communicated Captain Milledge's orders to the troop. Thomas was a loyal member of Milledge's troop, who, when he was not drumming, had the job of administering floggings to the disobedient Rangers at Argyle.

The Privates at Argyle are a fairly anonymous lot, although they were the largest group of soldiers at the fort. The names of many of the privates are completely unknown. Others are known through brief accounts. While some rose in the ranks to become non-commissioned officers, most remained Privates throughout their stay at Argyle. For some, their stay was brief, lasting less than six months. Others, however, were 'lifers' and spent more than a decade at the fort. Some of the privates were colorful personalities as well. Obadiah Gruenig was a private in Milledge's Troop until he was caught stealing horses. He and another man were hanged for their actions. Other privates were more fortunate and acquired plantations and became upstanding citizens after leaving Argyle.

Many people came to Argyle, some not of their own free will, but at the whim of the government. One man from Virginia, whose name is not recorded, stole a horse and was sentenced to hard labor at Argyle—surely, a fate worse than death. Others, such as the 14 members of the Schlechtermann family were indentured servants from the Palatine region of Germany. In exchange for free passage to America, indentured servants 'belonged' to the Georgia Trustees for a period of five years. The Schlechtermanns were sent to Argyle to farm, but the father and mother, as well as several of their children, succumbed to disease in the hostile environment. For other Trustees' servants at Fort Argyle death was more swift. John and Helen Smyth, husband and wife, were murdered when two escaped prisoners ransacked the fort. No Rangers were in the fort at the time. The villains were later caught, convicted of the crime, and executed. The body of one of them, an Irishman named William Shannon, was later hung at the entrance of Ogeechee Sound as a warning to other foreign infiltrators.

Who were the Georgia Rangers? They were a mix of English, first generation Americans, Germans, Scots, South Carolinians, and Virginians, who held down the fort at Argyle in the name of the British Crown. They kept the fort operating from 1733 to 1767 through King George's War (1739 to 1747), the Seven Years' War (1757 to 1763), and numerous skirmishes with Native Americans. One of their final tasks was to put down an uprising surrounding the unpopular Stamp Act in Savannah, which they performed dutifully. The Rangers performed a multitude of other tasks, such as escorting travelers, delivering letters, catching runaway servants and slaves, and herding livestock. The Georgia Rangers were an independent lot of courageous men, whose contributions to American heritage were enormous. The ruins of Fort Argyle in the Ogeechee River swamp remain as their legacy.

WHO WERE THE ENEMY?

During the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries Georgia was the scene of an international struggle for territorial control by the major world powers. Spain's grip on the region began to loosen after the abandonment of the Guale missions in Georgia in the sixteenth century. With the establishment of Charleston in 1670, England began to extend her reach into what was to become Georgia. The Apalachee were one of Spain's strongest Native American allies, and in 1704 British Colonel James Moore made a successful destructive

raid against them, which proved to be a major blow to Spanish domination in the region. The raid was followed soon after by the defeat of other Native American groups during the Yamassee War. In the early 1720s, South Carolina interjected its authority into the Altamaha River basin with the construction of Fort King George near

Darien. The Georgia colony was formed in 1732 and settlers arrived from England to establish the town of Savannah in February, 1733. Other small settlements, such as Abercorn, Josephstown, Thunderbolt, and Skidaway, followed within months of James Oglethorpe's arrival. Major settlements, such as Augusta, Darien, Ebenezer, and Frederica, followed a few years later. Spain and France were the major threats to Georgia. Creek Indians, loyal to the Spanish, and Cherokee, loyal to the French, were the immediate threat to colonial Georgia. The Spanish made a concerted effort to wipe out Georgia in 1742, but with the aid of Fort Argyle's Rangers, they were repulsed at the Battle of Bloody Marsh on St. Simon's Island. The French, whose stronghold was at Fort Toulouse on the Coosa River in what is now central Alabama, never attacked the tidewater sections of Georgia, but were enemies nevertheless. While Fort Argyle never was besieged, it served as a military garrison through two wars.

General Oglethorpe positioned the Rangers at Fort Argyle as an early warning of an attack from the interior by the Spanish. Fort Argyle was a key defensive point on the frontline of Georgia's defensive perimeter. From their Ogeechee River fort the Ranger garrison at Argyle patrolled the frontier on horseback, on foot, and by boat. Fort Argyle served as a base of operations for the Rangers and as a place of refuge for settlers in the region during periods of military threat.

BUILDING AND REBUILDING THE FORT

We now know that at least two forts, and possibly a third, were constructed at Fort Argyle. The first was completed in the fall of 1733, when England was at peace with her adversaries. This fort was a very small square enclosure with projecting corner bastions, and was defended by four cannon. It probably had a strong two-story central blockhouse built on many wooden piers but its exact dimensions are not known. It may have been similar to the blockhouse at Fort King George, an earlier fort on the Altamaha River, which was about 27 feet square. The buildings associated with the first fort lacked brick. If they had chimneys, they were probably constructed of sticks and mud.

The second Fort Argyle was built in 1742 or 1743 at the height of King George's War. This fort was a square enclosure measuring 110 feet on each side. It was considerably larger than the earlier fort, although it may have lacked the corner bastions and central blockhouse seen on the first fort. Instead the central part of the second fort may have served as an open parade ground. Brick for chimneys became available for the first time. A barracks building, composed of at least two rooms, was located along the eastern wall of the fort, on the bank of the Ogeechee River. This barracks had a large 'H-style' brick chimney used for heating and cooking.

A third rebuilding of the fort occurred in the 1760s during the French and Indian War. This was a time when the largest number of Rangers were garrisoned at Fort Argyle. The archaeological team suspected that this fort was larger than the previous fort, although very little is known about it. The barracks built during the previous construction phase probably continued to be used during this period. This fort was abandoned in 1767 when the Georgia Rangers were dismissed by General Thomas Gage, Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Forces in North America.

Archaeology at Argyle

HOW WAS THE FORT FOUND?

The general vicinity of Fort Argyle has been known since the fort was abandoned, but the precise location of the fort ruins was not known (Figure 2). The fort is shown on a few early maps of Georgia, but none of these maps provided sufficient detail to pinpoint the fort. Historians, such as Larry Ivers, were able to learn a lot about Fort Argyle and the Rangers from the surviving historical records, but it fell to the archaeologists to unearth tangible proof of the fort's existence and additional information about the people who used it. Figure 3 shows the predicted palisade outline of the first Fort Argyle and Figure 4 shows the predicted palisade outline

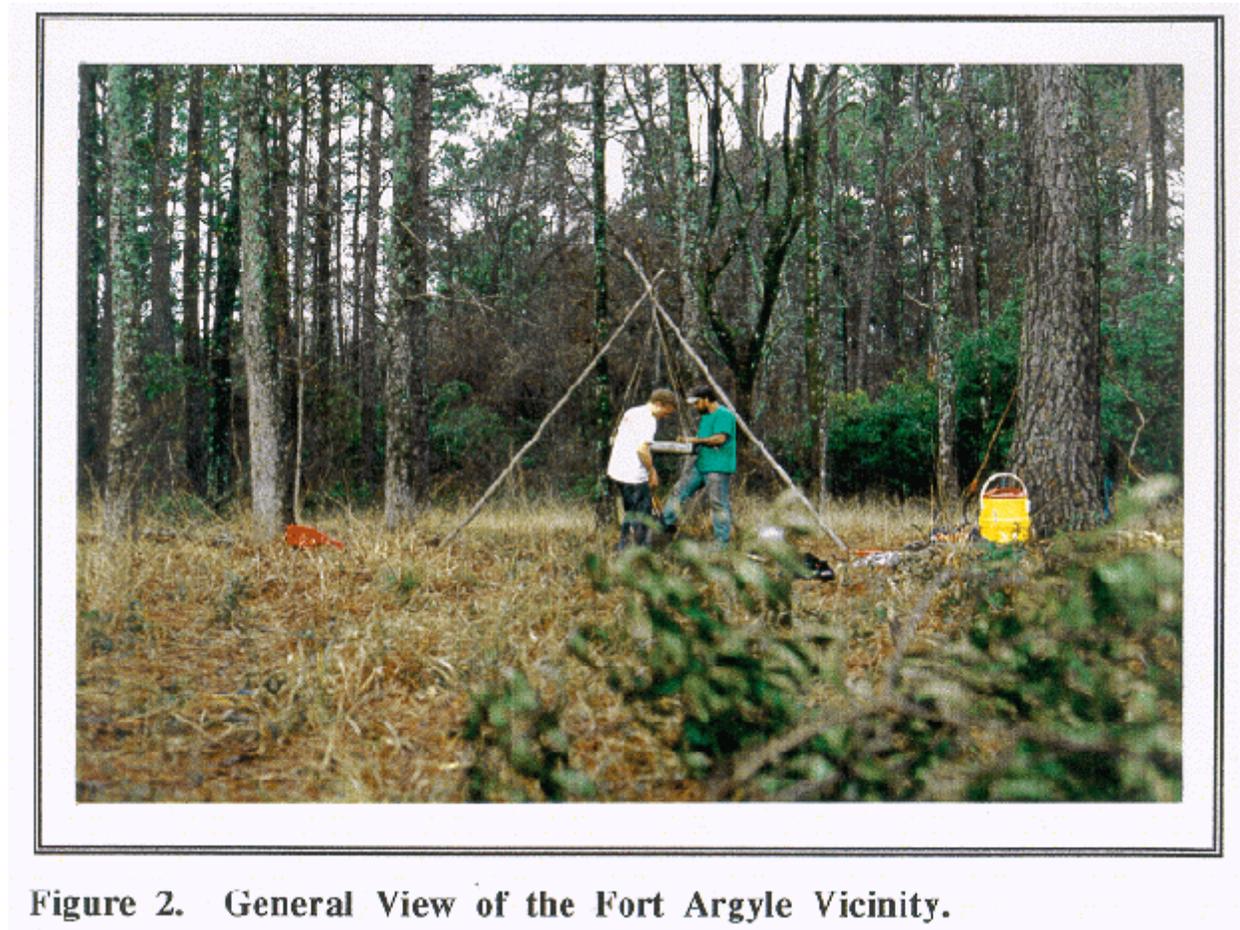


Figure 2. General View of the Fort Argyle Vicinity.

of the second Fort Argyle. The location of the archaeologist's excavations at Fort Argyle is shown in Figure 5.

The fort ruins were found in 1985 by a team of archaeologists with Southeastern Archeological Services led by Chad Braley. Chad and his research team began by using two survey techniques a remote sensing technique, known as soil resistivity, and systematic shovel tests, to narrow the search. The Soil resistivity consisted of taking hundreds of soil resistance readings across the areas suspected to contain the fort. Computer maps produced from this information showed certain areas that possibly represent the remains of buildings

associated with the fort. Small test holes, 50 square centimeters cm (20 square inches), were dug on a 20 square meter (66 square feet) grid across an areas suspected to contain the fort. All the soil from these test holes was sifted

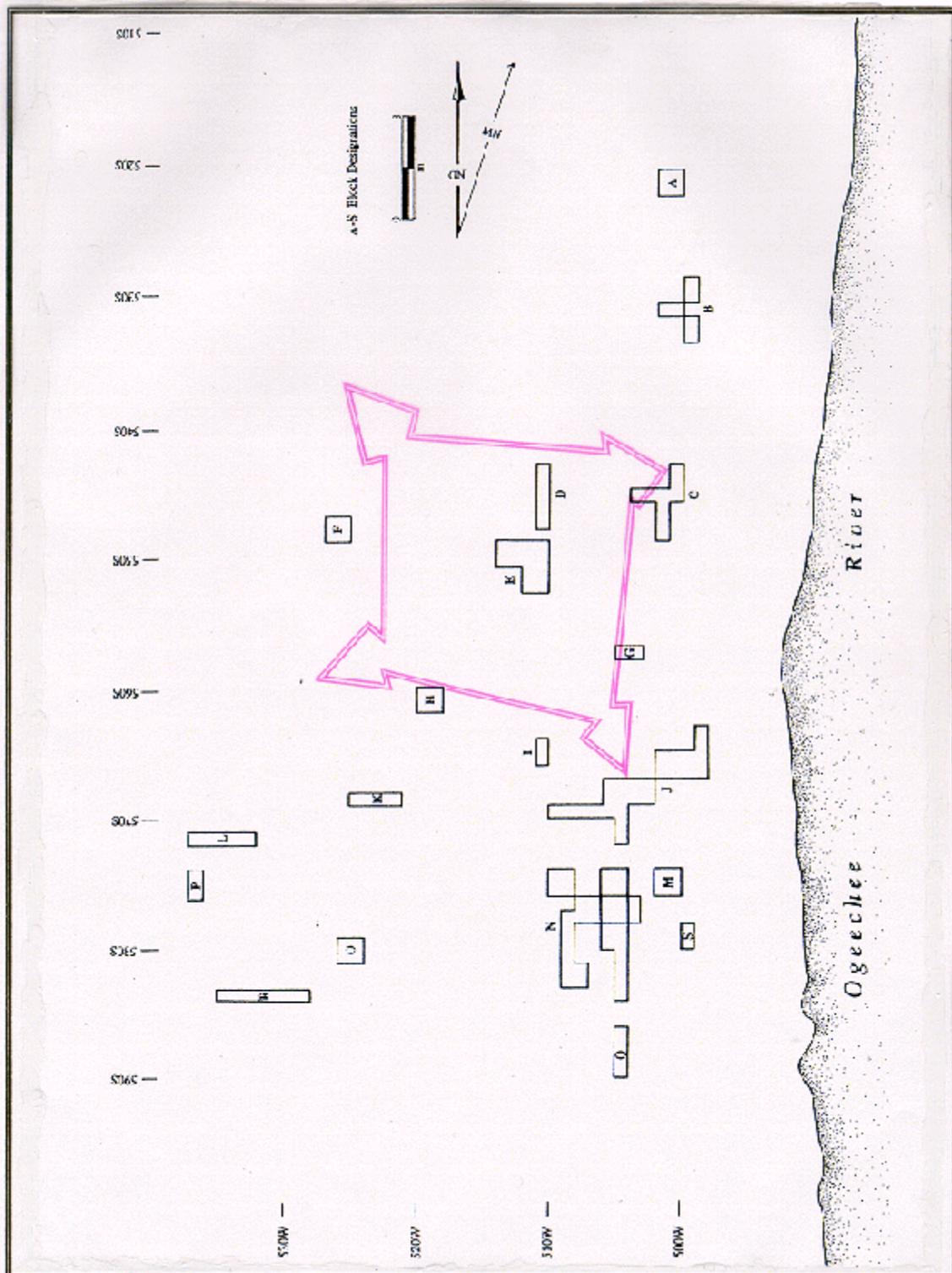


Figure 3. Predicted Outline of First Fort Argyle.

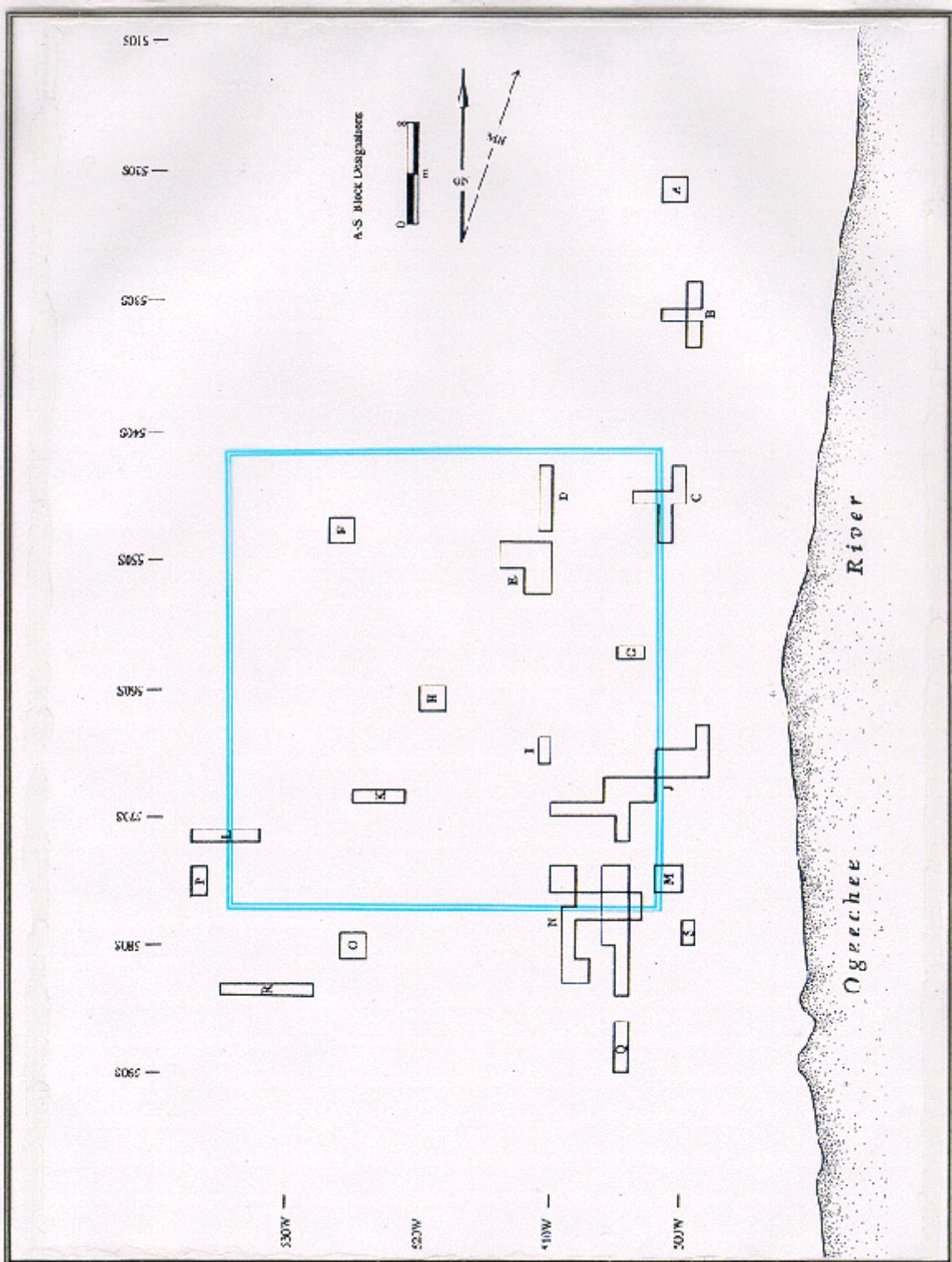


Figure 4. Predicted Outline of Second Fort Argyle.

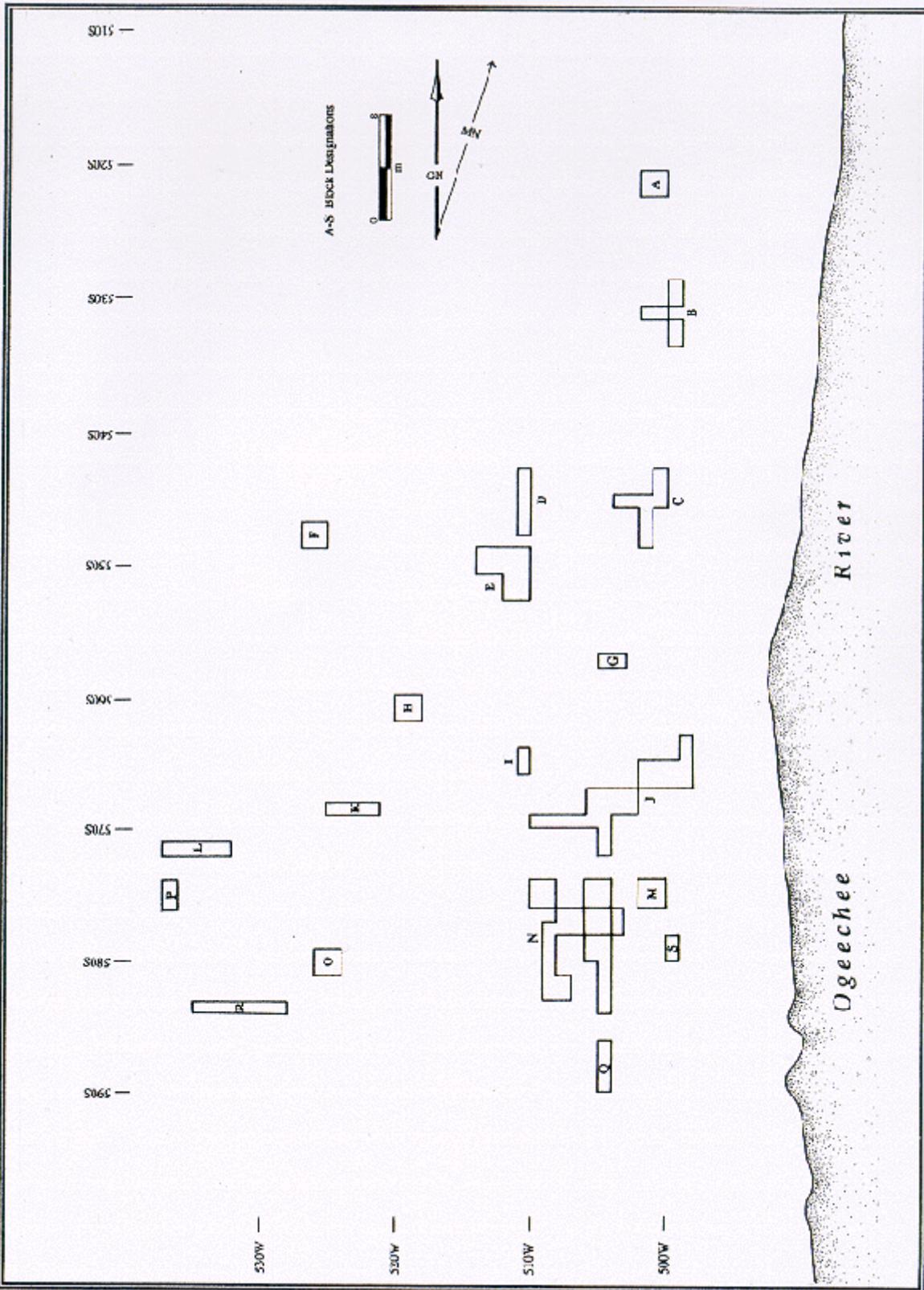


Figure 5. Excavation Plan of the Fort Argyle Site, 9BN28.

through screen wire and all the artifacts were collected. The patterns of these artifacts led the archaeologists

closer to finding the fort. Next, the archaeology team excavated a series of test excavation holes of varying size intended to "check out" promising areas that were located during the survey phase. The ground around the fort had been plowed following the establishment of the fort. This soil contained many small broken artifacts from the colonial period. To their delight, archaeologists found the remnants of the fort's foundations in the next soil zone. Braley returned to the laboratory where he and his colleagues cleaned and analyzed the artifacts they had found. They combined this information with their historical research and were able to construct the first chapter in the story of Fort Argyle.

Another chapter was written in 1996 when a team of archaeologists with the LAMAR Institute, under the direction of Daniel Elliott, returned to Fort Argyle for a five-week excavation project. This team also surveyed 150 acres surrounding the fort to see if other associated settlements could be located nearby. Elliott's team uncovered more of the fort that Braley had identified. Figures 6, and 7 show detailed plan views, or overhead views, of some of the features that were uncovered by archaeologists. Figure 6 includes a portion of the southeastern corner bastion palisade ditch from the first fort and a large H-style brick chimney from the later fort. The corner bastion was a standard feature on eighteenth century forts. Soldiers firing from the bastion could aim their guns to cover their flanks. The second fort probably did not have any corner bastions, but was a simple rectangular stockade. A concentration of posts that supported the blockhouse for the first fort was identified in the center of the fort. From within the two-story blockhouse, the Rangers could fire their cannons and flintlocks in the event the outer wall of the fort was breached by the enemy. The blockhouse also served as living quarters and a warehouse for food and ammunition. Figure 7 shows a rectangular trench for an early house at Fort Argyle. The house would have been located outside of the walls of the first fort. This house must have been in ruins before the second fort was built however, since the palisade ditch from the second fort cut through the ruins of the house. The project came to an end before the architectural plan of the first fort could be completely understood, but hypothesized layouts for the first and second Fort Argyle were presented. Elliott's team also found tentative evidence for a third fort on the site, which awaits future researchers.

WHAT DID ARCHAEOLOGISTS FIND IN THE FORT?

The archaeologists found a great deal of architectural evidence associated with Fort Argyle, including several sections of palisade ditch, a moat, two corner bastions, and several buildings. During the earliest period of the fort the Rangers probably lived together in a central blockhouse. This blockhouse, which was likely a two-story wooden building, was supported by a series of large posts. By the 1740s barracks equipped with at least one large brick chimney, were built along the fort wall to house the Rangers.

The artifacts that were used and discarded by the garrison at Fort Argyle form the material culture of the Georgia Rangers. A few examples of artifacts found at the site are shown in Figure 8. These include: an English cast-brass shoe buckle (A); a decorative brass brad for adorning leather (B); an English clay tobacco pipe bowl (C); a poorly cast lead bullet for a flintlock gun, which was locally made (D); a hand painted Chinese porcelain teacup sherd (E); a red and green Venetian glass trade bead (F); an English combed yellow slipware dish sherd (G); an English floral teapot sherd (H); and a molded salt glazed stoneware plate sherd (I). Although the fort was used for more than three decades it was surprisingly lacking in eighteenth century trash. This dearth of trash was partly the result of years of farming on the site. One of the former landowners was fond of collecting relics from the site and the whereabouts of these items is no longer known. Much of the trash generated within the fort was probably tossed into the Ogeechee River, which was located immediately adjacent to the fort.

The artifacts that were recovered by the archaeologists include an interesting assortment of objects that have their own stories to tell. Artifacts related to the fort and its buildings include wrought iron nails, window glass, and one wrought iron hinge. A variety of broken sherds of pottery were found, including many English-made wares, locally made wares, and a few sherds of Chinese

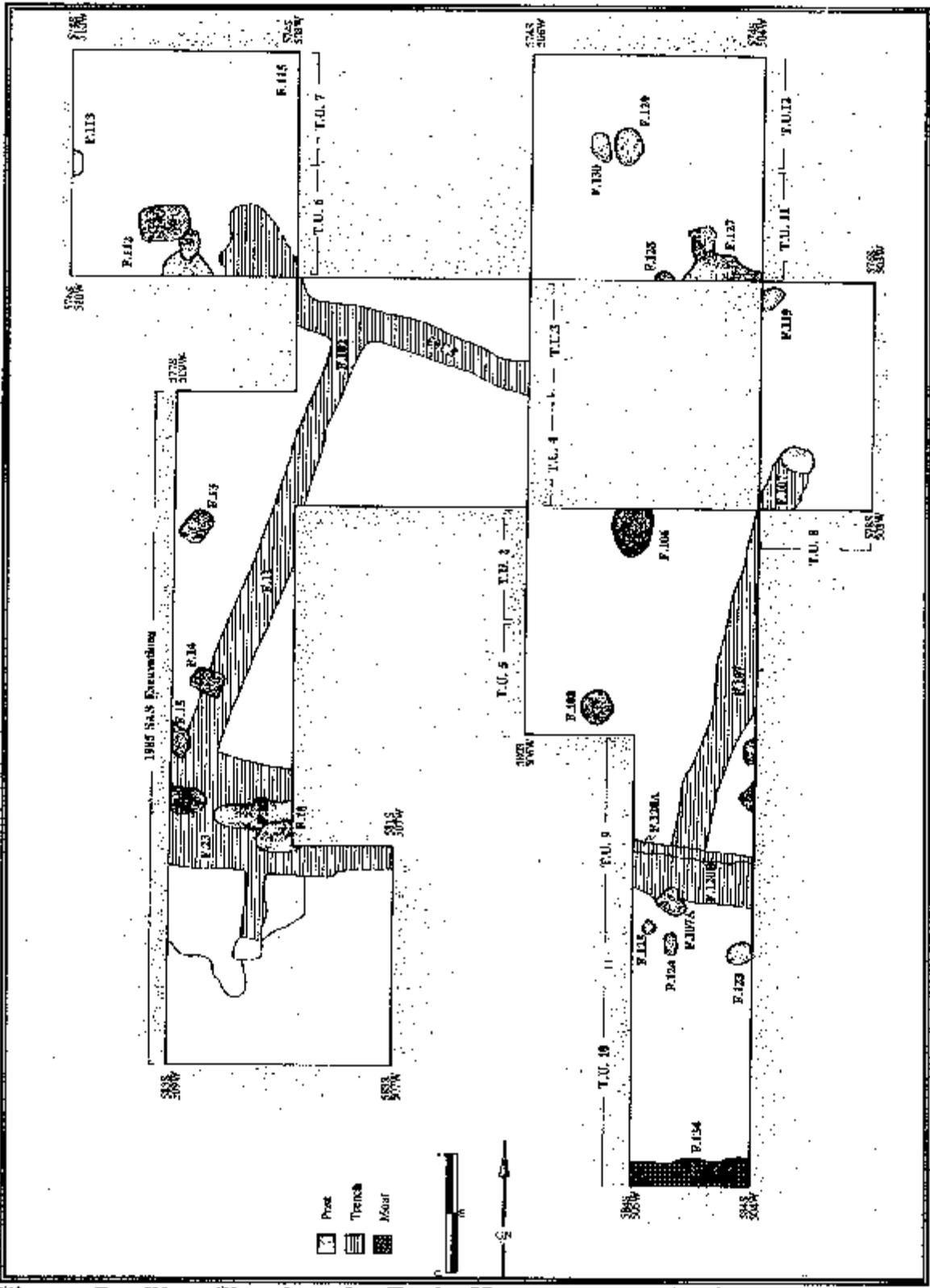


Figure 7. Plan Showing the Early House and the Palisade Trench.

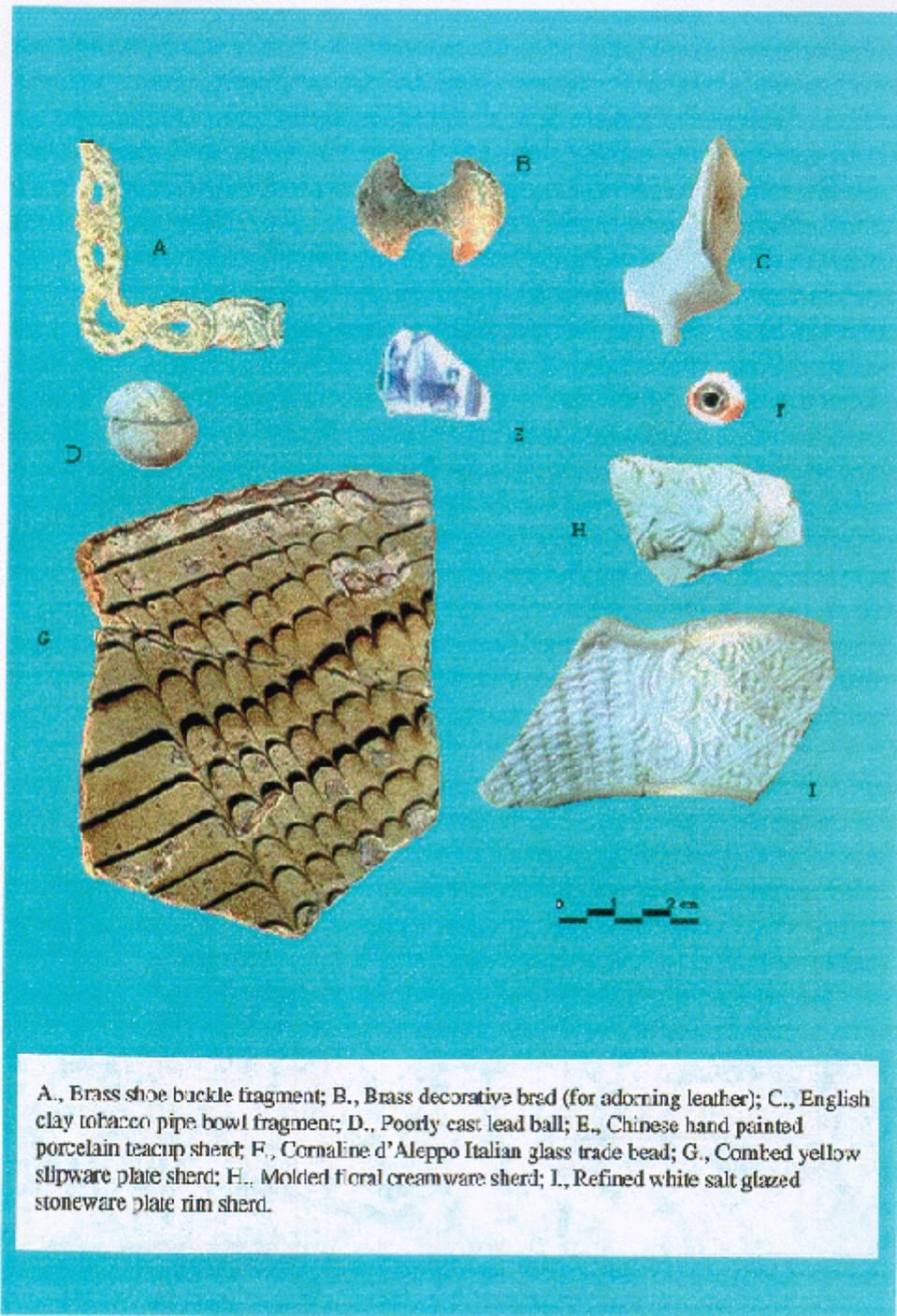


Figure 8. Selected Artifacts Found at Fort Argyle.

porcelain. Broken wine bottle glass and wine goblets, perhaps the aftermath from a rowdy celebration, also were found. Other items include clothing parts, such as brass buttons and shoe buckles, smoking pipes, and a variety of lead balls or bullets.

One example of an artifact type found at Fort Argyle that tells us a lot about the past is the gunflint -a piece of shaped stone that was mounted in flintlock guns and used to make the spark that set off the charge. Gunflints are frequently found on colonial sites, since all hand-held weapons from the eighteenth century needed them. By looking closely at the gunflints from Fort Argyle archaeologists answered a number of questions.

- What types of weapons were used at Fort Argyle? Because of their hardware design, bigger guns required bigger gunflints. Archaeologists examined the size range for the gunflints and were able to determine that most of the weapons were smaller than muskets, which was the standard weapon of the British infantry. Unlike other British forts in Georgia, pistols were common at Argyle. These gunflint data suggest that Rangers preferred smaller, less cumbersome weapons than the regular British Infantry.
- Where did Fort Argyle's gunflints come from? Flints from France are easy to distinguish from English flints. French flints are usually light brown in color and translucent while English flints are varying shades of gray and are opaque. Nearly all of Fort Argyle's gunflints were made from English flint. Some of the gunflints may have been produced at Fort Argyle from flint cobbles that were brought to America as ship's ballast.
- Were gunflints conserved? The degree of exhaustion of gunflints is an indicator of the value placed on these objects. Although gunflints were very cheap in England they often had a higher value on the frontier. If it had been difficult for the Rangers to acquire gunflints one would expect the flints to be carefully conserved and fully exhausted, which is precisely what Fort Argyle's gunflints indicate. The gunflint data suggest that some military supplies were difficult for the Rangers to acquire.

These specific discoveries help reveal general patterns about life at Fort Argyle. For example, by knowing where the gunflints were made allows the archaeologist to monitor colonial trade patterns or black-market trade. The amount of wear on gunflints and their careful conservation can suggest whether the garrison enjoyed adequate and consistent supplies.

Sometimes archaeologists find artifacts that demonstrate the resourcefulness of the early settlers. An example of this is shown in Figure 9. The upper gunflint is made from English flint and brought to this country by boat, while the lower example is made from a sherd of an English glass wine bottle. When regular gunflints were not available, the soldiers fashioned substitutes from whatever they could find much like Television's *McGyver!*

HOW DO ARCHAEOLOGISTS KNOW WHAT THEY KNOW?

Contrary to what many people think, archaeology is not magic. It is, instead, a careful social science that relies on a wide array of research tools, scientific methods, and diligent study for its advancement (Figure 10). Archaeology, as a science, has been around for more than 100 years, but historical archaeology is a relatively new scientific field-dating to the early 1970s.

Archaeologists use a variety of dating techniques to estimate ages of different parts of a site. Some are quite obvious-a British 1760 half penny, for example, could not have been discarded prior to that year, because it did not exist. Therefore, a trash pit containing a 1760 penny would date sometime after 1760. Other methods are more complicated, but in simple terms, pottery sherds, wine bottles, tobacco pipes, window

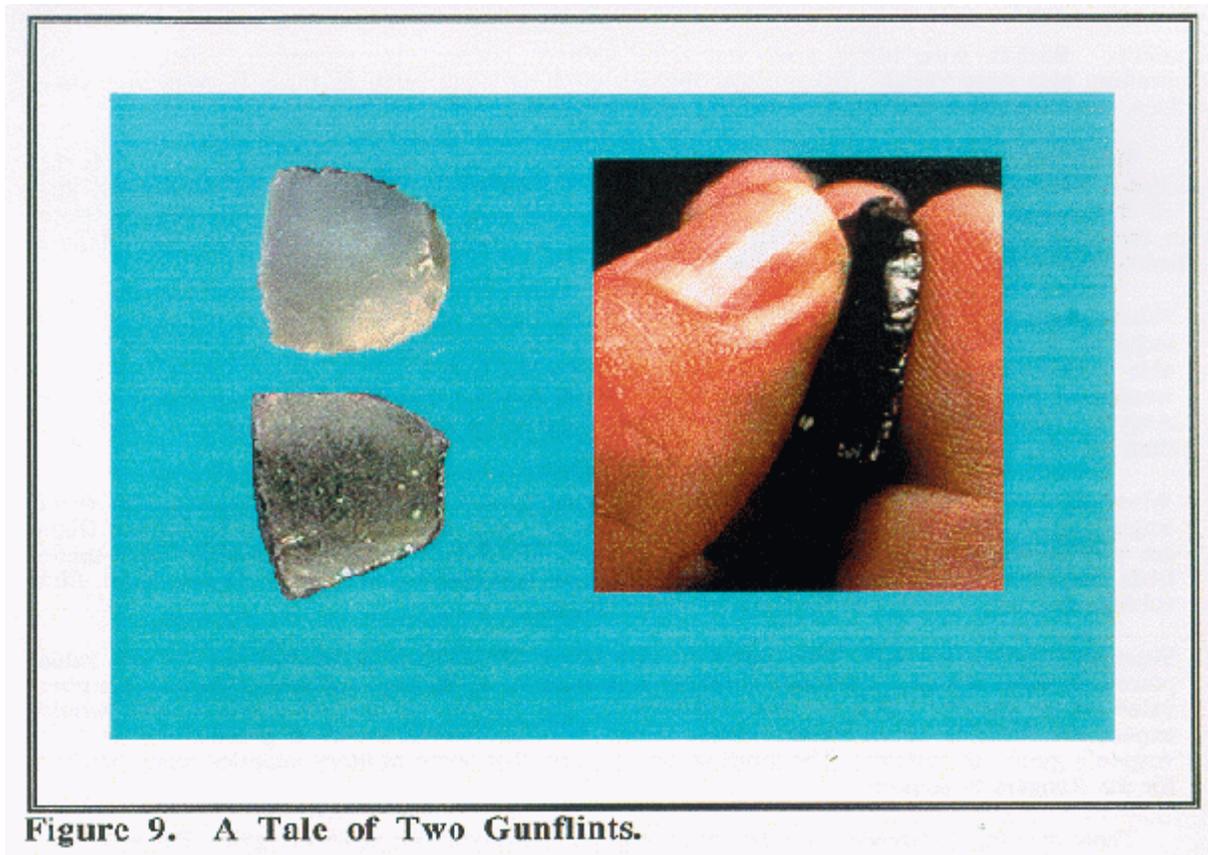


Figure 9. A Tale of Two Gunflints.

glass, nails, and even bricks can be used to estimate the age of an archaeological site.

One brick, in particular, helped to pinpoint the age of the brick chimney in the barracks building at Fort Argyle. This brick could be dated because embedded in it was a small piece of stoneware pottery that was not made prior to 1740. This sherd was accidentally mixed with the clay when the brick was made. Since the brick had to be more recent than the pottery, we know that this chimney dated sometime after 1740. From the historical records we learned that Captain Noble Jones brought a load of 10,000 bricks to Fort Argyle sometime between 1742 and 1743. Through a combined use of archaeological information and historical records, we concluded that the bricks were part of Noble Jones' shipment and used in the chimney for the barracks building in the second fort.

Where artifacts are found is often as important as what artifacts are found. The brick chimney for the barracks building just described, was built on top of the corner bastion for the first fort. Consequently, both structures could not have been standing at the same time. The walls of the first fort were tom down prior to the construction of the second fort.

Archaeologists also make discoveries by comparing other sites that have been excavated. Argyle is not the first colonial fort excavated in Georgia. During the 1950s archaeologists excavated most of Fort Frederica on St. Simon's Island. While Frederica was not a Ranger fort, it did share a number of similarities with Argyle:

- both were square forts with projecting corner bastions;



- both were positioned on bends in the river that were advantageous defensive positions, and;
- both contained buildings within them.

Frederica and Argyle also had major differences, such as:

- Frederica was considerably larger than Argyle with more substantial earthworks, and;
- those who built Frederica used tabby mortar walls (an early form of cement made from burned and crushed oyster shells) in its construction.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Fort Argyle is a special site and it had an important role in the founding of Georgia. It also played a role in establishing the territorial limits of the British Empire. Had Argyle and the other British frontier defenses fallen to the Spanish or French, the world map would probably appear very different today. The archaeological ruins of Fort Argyle are presently located on U.S. Army property, but the site belongs to all Americans. The U.S. Army has an important responsibility to protect this fragile resource so that future generations will be able to learn from it. The Army's job as a site steward is two-fold:

- To protect the site from destruction; and
- To provide the public with interpretations of the site.

This archaeological study is one attempt to help the Army make intelligent management decisions for protecting the site and to make it available to the public as an interpretive cultural resource.

So now you know about the Georgia Rangers at Fort Argyle! The fort may have been a small wooden structure that was isolated on the frontier, but a lot of exciting history took place within its walls. Less than 10 percent of the Fort Argyle has been excavated and the remaining 90 percent has the potential to answer many questions about the past. Future research may be able to provide us with a more complete picture of the everyday life of Rangers, soldier's wives, and indentured servants on the frontier. One thing archaeologists learned from this project is that there are so many aspects of daily life in the eighteenth century that we still do not understand. For example, Fort Argyle functioned within a network of defensive outposts that included dozens of other forts (Figure 11). Although a few of these, such as Fort Frederica, are preserved as parks, most remain lost. The interest generated by this project will hopefully lead to future studies designed to locate other fort sites. In many ways the Fort Argyle archaeology project generated more questions than answers. So it goes.....

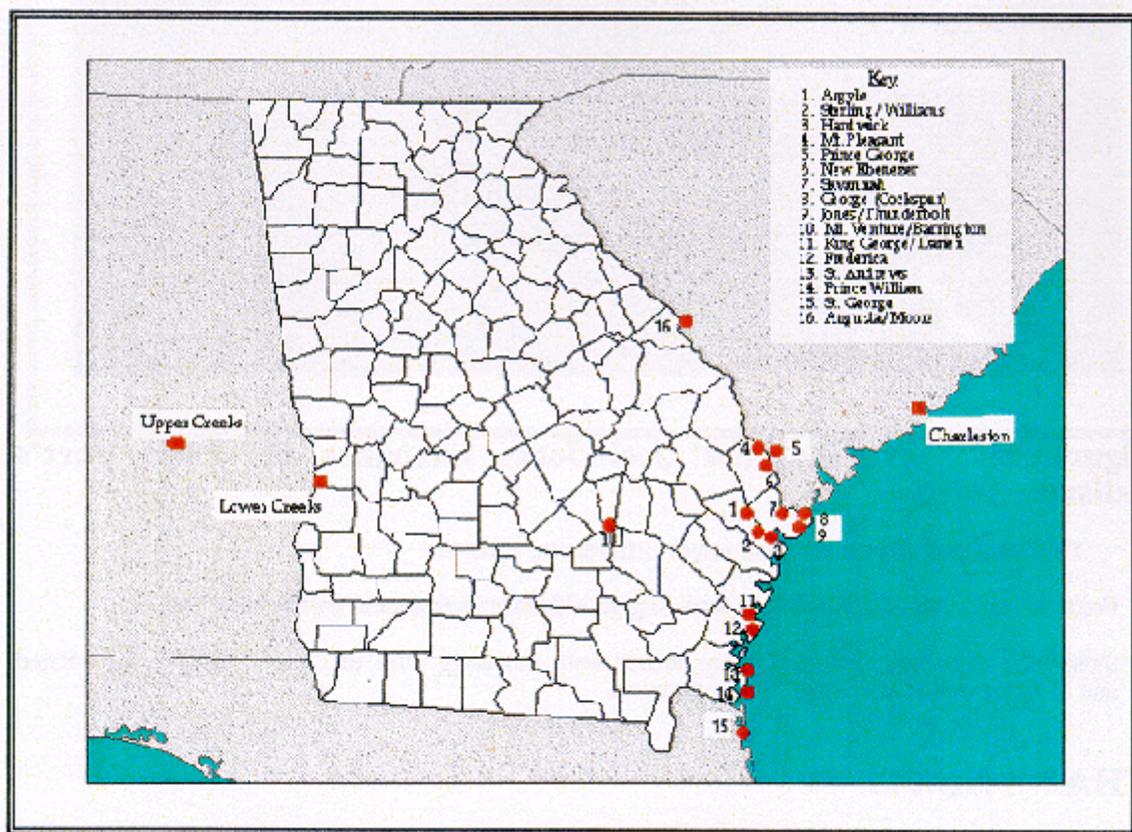


Figure 11. Location of Forts in Colonial Georgia.

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Appendix I. Partial List of Georgia Rangers and Others at Argyle.

Last Name	First Name	Rank	Service Dates
Milledge	John	Qtrm; Lt., Capt., Commander	1742-1747; 1757-1767
Milledge	John, Jr.	Cadet	1762-1767
Munday	Samuel	Private, Ranger	1759-1761
Niess	John L.	Private, Ranger	1764-1767
Nunez	Moses	2nd Lieutenant	1759-1767
Ordner	Henry	Private, Ranger	1760-1767
Ordner	Adam	Corporal	1760-1767
Perkins	John	Quartermaster & Surgeon	1765-1766
Pevey	Joseph	Private, Ranger	1740
Price	John	Private, Ranger	1760-1764
Roth	George B.	Ranger?	1735-1736
Salfner	Matthias	Private, Ranger	1759-1761
Scheffler	Georg	Ranger	1744-
Schlechtermann	John	Servant	1738-1739
Schlechtermann	Anna Barbara	Servant	1738-1739
Schlechtermann	Peter	Ranger	1738-
Schlechtermann	Jeremiah	Ranger, Armourer (1768)	1738-
Schneider	Henry	Private, Ranger	1759-1763
Shannon	William	Criminal	1740
Smith	Thomas	Private, Ranger	1761-1763
Smith	William	Private, Ranger	1758-1759
Smyth	Helen B.	Servant	1740
Smyth	John	Servant	1740
Staud (Leinberger)	Maria	Ranger's wife	1740
Stuart	Michael	Private, Ranger	1758-1762
Swinton	William	Private, Ranger	1759-1760
Teesdale	John	Ranger	1733-1735?
Whitefield	James	Quartermaster	1766-1767
Wall	Thomas	Servant	1733
Watts	Jacob	Ranger	1733-1736
Weddal	Austin	Ranger	1735-1738
Wicks	Francis	Ranger	1733
Williams	Richard, Jr.	Private, Ranger	1763-1764
Williams	Richard, Sr.	Private, Ranger	1761-1764
Wrights	Joseph	Indian Trader	1760
Young	Peter	Private, Ranger	1759-1763
Young	Thomas	Private, Ranger	1758-1763

