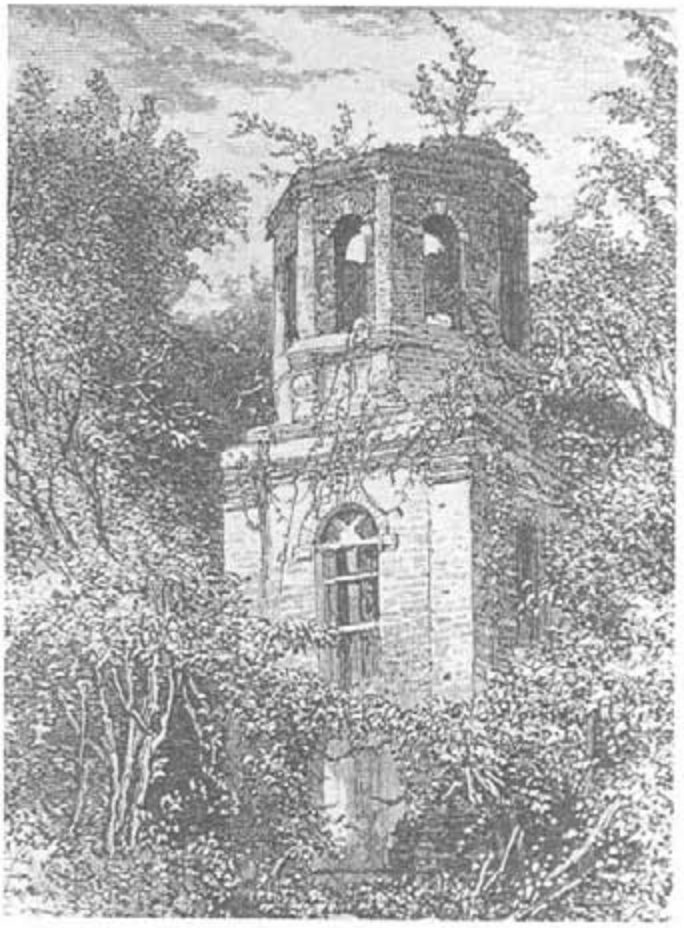
Old Dorchester State Park

Visitor's Guide



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South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism
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Introduction

Old Dorchester State Park is the site of a town that no longer exists. The colonial village of Dorchester once stood entirely within the bounds of the park. And for nearly one hundred years that small town flourished here on the banks of the Ashley River.

This guide is a history of the village of Dorchester, from its founding by Massachusetts settlers in the 1690s through its decline after the Revolutionary War and on to its preservation as a South Carolina state park in the 1960s. It is not a complete history. In spite of extensive research, much about Dorchester remains unknown. More information will be uncovered, however, as historical and archaeological investigations of the site continue. A similar admission was made nearly one hundred and fifty years ago. Writing about Dorchester in 1858, an anonymous correspondent for *Russell's Magazine* recognized that there was no complete history of the town and that his account, too, was incomplete. Still, he voiced a hope that his brief description would bring forth additional knowledge from his readers. The words and expectations of that author form an introduction as fitting to the following story as they were to his own:

> *Notwithstanding these many facts, collected from as many different sources, there is no continuous history of Dorchester, authentic or inauthentic, to be found in the annals of South Carolina. There may be, and we have no doubt there are, many well substantiated traditions concerning the place, existing in some of our oldest families, which have never been given to the public: and we sincerely trust, that the very meagreness of the present article may have the effect of bringing to light these traditions.*

The tower of St. George's Church survived war, fire, scavengers and an earthquake. It still stands in the center of what was once the village of Dorchester.

To Settle the Gospel

On December 5, 1695, the brigantine Friendship sailed from Boston bound for Charlestown in South Carolina. Aboard the ship were Joseph Lord, a young Harvard-educated minister, and several members of his church. In October they had formed the nucleus of a congregation at the Massachusetts town of Dorchester. As the advance party of that congregation, they were traveling to "settle the Gospel," to found their church in the young southern colony.

They were Congregationalists--Puritans--religious dissenters from the Church of England. A desire to simplify the Anglican liturgy and maintain the independence of their congregations had led their ancestors to emigrate from England to Massachusetts earlier in the century. Now this group of Congregationalists prepared to depart Massachusetts for a new land.

Religious persecution did not prompt them to leave their homes. Massachusetts Bay was a Puritan colony. It is possible that other pressures drove

William Norman and Rebecca Axtell, prominent dissenters identified on this early map, welcomed the Congregationalists to the upper Ashley River. The site of the Dorchester settlement is marked "Mr. Rose" and "Mr. Smith" for two men who apparently had once laid claim to the property.

them out. Land may have become scarce and expensive in eastern Massachusetts. And events of the previous twenty years--from a bloody Indian war in the 1670s and political turmoil in the 1680s to the recent witchcraft hysteria in Salem--might have prompted the Congregationalists to look for new homes elsewhere.

Perhaps the lure of Carolina pulled the Congregationalists southward. The new colony's attractions were undeniably strong. There was the promise of religious tolerance and land ready for the taking. The presence of other religious dissenters surely drew the Congregationalists to South Carolina. Dissenters from the Church of England made up the majority of South Carolina's population, and they comprised the bulk of one of the main political factions in the colony. William Norman, a member of the group that accompanied Rev. Lord to South Carolina, was already living in the new colony on land northwest of Charlestown along the Ashley River. Norman and other prominent dissenters probably invited the Massachusetts settlers to South Carolina.

The Friendship docked at Charlestown on December 20 at the end of a storm-tossed voyage. After receiving friendly greetings in the coastal town, the Congregationalists spent more than three weeks scouting inland locations for their future settlement. They chose a site on the upper reaches of the Ashley River, on vacant land adjoining William Norman's property. There several dissenters welcomed the Congregationalists as future neighbors. Rev. Lord and company then returned to Charlestown and set sail on the Friendship on February 8, 1696.

One hundred and fifty-eight Congregationalists left Boston for South Carolina in January 1697. Violent winter storms snapped their ship's bowsprit and toppled its mast, but the settlers arrived safely in their new colony on February 22.

A New England Township in South Carolina

An agent for the Congregationalists obtained grants for two tracts totaling 4,050 acres about thirty miles northwest of Charlestown. The grants encompassed land on the north side of the Ashley River from the mouth of Bossoe Creek (present-day Dorchester Creek) to William Norman's property about three miles to the west. They extended several miles north (to include much of what is now the southeastern part of the city of Summerville). It was good land, with abundant oak, cedar and cypress.

The Congregationalists divided the land to re-create a New England-style township in South Carolina, complete with farm lots, a commons, and a section reserved for a mill. Fifty-acre farm lots lined the riverbank. Two tiers of forty-five-acre agricultural lots lay above them. On a peninsula between the mouth of Bossoe Creek and the Ashley River, about fifty acres were set aside for a "place of trade," a village to serve the outlying farm lots. The Congregationalists distributed the land by lottery on March 23, 1697, and marked their property the next day.

The town was laid out with 116 numbered lots of a quarter-acre each, neatly arrayed between parallel and perpendicular streets. Next to a series of riverfront lots at the southern end of the town was a small market square. The entire township was called Dorchester after the town in Massachusetts that had been home to so many of the settlers. Soon, however, the name would come to refer only to the village on the Ashley River.

Anglicans and Dissenters

Around 1700 the Congregationalists built a meeting house for their religious services about two miles from Dorchester. It was the only house of worship in the area, so it attracted people of various religious persuasions. As a later resident concluded, these early settlers had not been particular about the church--or meeting house--they attended:

> *People that were inclinable for the Church had generally this Notion that they could serve God very well in a Meeting, and that it was better for them to go to Meeting than to stay at home. Therefore Scarce any body resorted anywhere else but to the Meeting house which lies in a very Convenient Place to resort to, and as it were in the Center of the Parish.*

Because of the predominance of the Congregationalists and the existence of their meeting house, Congregationalism was "the religion most in fashion" in the early years along the upper Ashley. But another denomination, bolstered by an increasing number of adherents in the area and aided by developments in the colonial legislature, soon challenged the Congregational church for supremacy around Dorchester.

In 1706 the colonial legislature passed an act declaring the Church of England the established church of South Carolina. The act divided the colony into parishes and required that Anglican churches and ministers be maintained at public expense in each parish. For eleven years Dorchester lay within the upper part of St. Andrews Parish. By 1717 the number of Anglicans living on the upper Ashley had increased, and that year they petitioned the legislature to create a separate parish there. The new parish was named St. George's, Dorchester. Commissioners appointed to build an Anglican church for St. George's selected town lot 99 in Dorchester, virtually in the center of the village, as the site for the structure. Construction on a small brick church began in August of 1719 and was substantially completed in a year. The sanctuary measured fifty feet long by thirty feet wide. A chancel--the space from which the clergyman presented the service--projected fifteen feet by five feet from one of its walls.

Pictured here in 1875, the Congregational meeting house served Dorchester's Puritan settlers for over 50 years. A new congregation renovated the old building in 1794 and used it off and on into the next century. An earthquake in 1886 left the structure a ruined shell.

Pleas of local Anglicans prompted the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, the London-based missionary organization of the Anglican Church, to send a minister to the young parish. The first pastor, Rev. Peter Tustian,

St. George's, Dorchester Parish provided Anglicans on the upper Ashley with a place of worship closer to their homes than the church in St. Andrews, 11 miles down the river.

arrived in the province in 1720 and quickly found himself embroiled in the political controversies that brought an end to proprietary rule in the colony. Tustian resigned within six months. His successor, Rev. Francis Varnod, came to South Carolina in October 1723 and presided over St. George's for almost thirteen years.

As the leader of an Anglican parish in the midst of dissenters from the Anglican Church, Varnod was eager to counter what he perceived to be the errors of his religious rivals. "I have the misfortune to be in a place that was 20 years ago all settled by Dissenters, " Varnod wrote. By the time of his service, however, the white population of the parish was almost equally divided between Anglicans and non-Anglicans, and Varnod was ready to assert the Church of England's strength in the area. To refute the arguments of the Congregationalists, he distributed Anglican religious pamphlets to the most prominent dissenters in the parish. To prevent the increase of religious dissent in St. George's, Varnod advocated the creation of a school in Dorchester to provide children with instruction in arithmetic, Greek, Latin--and religion. And to meet the needs of his growing congregation, he campaigned for the renovation of his little church.

The colonial legislature recognized that Varnod's church was dilapidated and in 1733 authorized construction of a new building. An act passed the next year dictated only that the existing sanctuary be repaired and enlarged and new pews be installed. Work progressed slowly as cold weather and shortages of labor and money brought occasional delays.

Still, by 1736 Rev. Varnod could look with assurance on the state of religion in his parish. Dissenters attended his services nearly every Sunday. Some even confided to him that they would rent pews in St. George's Church. Varnod's work of strengthening the Anglican faith in the parish continued only a short while longer, though. He died in September 1736 after a brief illness. St. George's Parish continued to flourish under his successors.

"A handsome service of Communion Plate" once graced St. George's Church in Dorchester. These pieces came into the possession of St. Paul's Church in Summerville, South Carolina, after St. George's was abandoned.

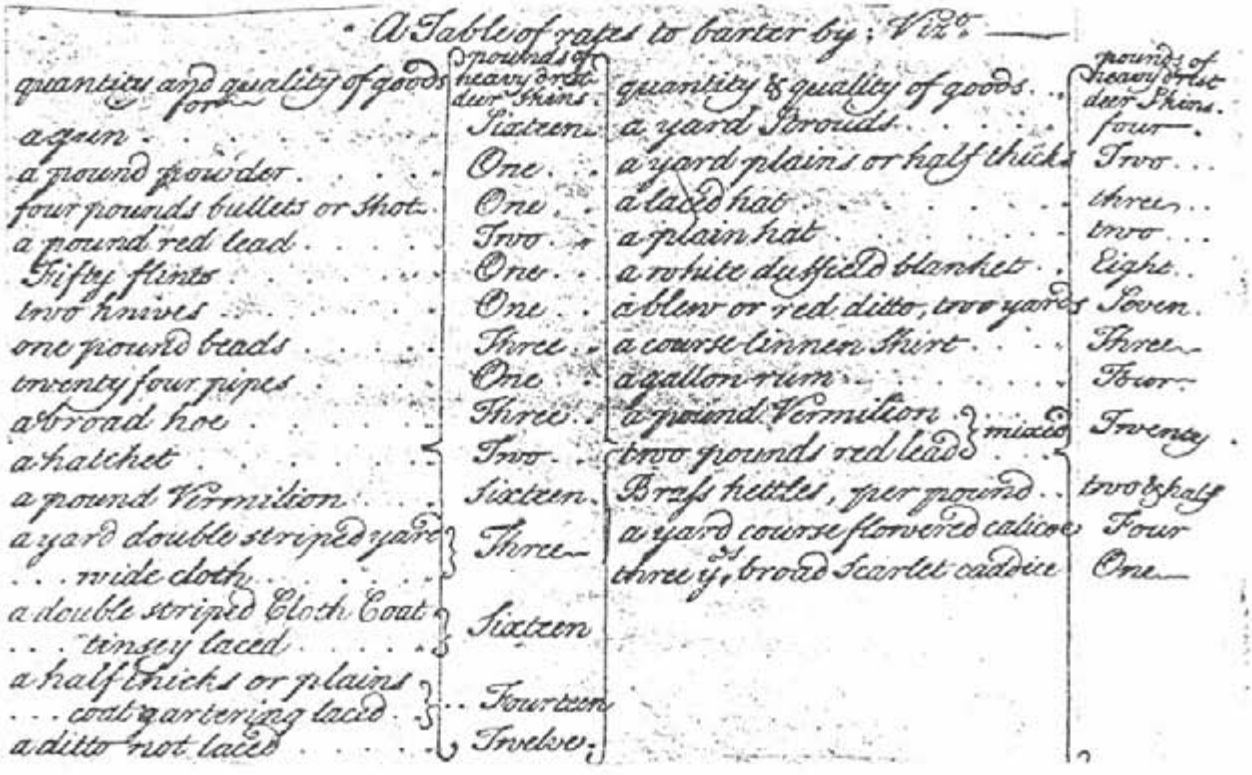
Traders and Planters

The Congregationalists and Anglicans who settled along the Ashley were as much concerned with making a living in this world as they were with gaining entry into the next. Local farmers traded potatoes, corn, peas, tallow, pork, and beef for the services of artisans and the wares of merchants. The merchants functioned as bankers by extending credit in a frontier community that often lacked cash.

The economy of Dorchester and the entire colony was on the verge of change, though, as Carolinians began to exploit several profitable commodities. A lucrative trade in deerskins with the Indians provided an early route to prosperity for South Carolina and Dorchester. Located on the Carolina frontier and offering easy access to Indian trading paths and the colony's main port at Charlestown, Dorchester was in a favorable spot to profit from the deerskin trade. Trains of pack horses laden with goods for the Cherokees to the northwest and the Creeks to the west moved inland through the village. Some Indians bartered with traders who operated from plantations outside of town. An Indian trading with Capt. Thomas Dymes of Dorchester in 1718 could acquire a gun for sixteen pounds of heavy dressed skins. Another pound of skins would buy a pound of gunpowder or four pounds of bullets or shot. Three pounds of skins would fetch a broad hoe, a coarse linen shirt, a yard of double-striped cloth, or a laced hat. And four pounds of deerskins would bring a gallon of rum.

Traders often shipped their bulky loads of skins down the Ashley to Charlestown in vessels built with dugout log hulls called periaguas. Quickly and easily constructed, periaguas could be propelled by sails or by oars. A periagua rowed by seven or eight slaves could carry 500 to 700 deerskins.

Lumber, tar, and pitch extracted from nearby forests for the shipbuilding industry were profitable early exports, especially after England placed a bounty, or subsidy, on them in 1704. Pitch, derived


A Table of rates to barter by: Viz.

quantity and quality of goods for	pounds of heavy dressed deer Skins.	quantity & quality of goods	pounds of heavy dressed deer Skins.
a gun	Sixteen	a yard Shrouds	four
a pound powder	One	a yard plains or half thicks	Two
four pounds bullets or shot	One	a laced hat	three
a pound red lead	Two	a plain hat	two
Fifty flints	One	a white duffield blanket	Eight
two knives	One	a blew or red ditto, two yards	Seven
one pound beads	Three	a course linnen Shirt	Three
twenty four pipes	One	a gallon rum	Four
a broad hoe	Three	a pound Vermilion mixed	Twenty
a hatchet	Two	two pounds red lead	
a pound Vermilion	Sixteen	Brass kettles, per pound	two & half
a yard double striped yard wide cloth	Three	a yard course flowered calico	Four
a double striped Cloth Coat tinsey laced	Sixteen	three yd broad Scarlet caddice	One
a half thicks or plains coat & tartering laced	Fourteen		
a ditto not laced	Twelve		

In exchange for deerskins, Dorchester traders such as Thomas Dymes provided Indians with a variety of goods. The items named in this exchange table made the Indians dependent on the British, kept them out of the influence of the French and Spanish, and changed their way of life in the process.

Rice brought vast wealth to the Ashley River planters. The methods of planting and harvesting the crop changed little from the 1700s to 1916, when this photograph was taken.

from pine tar and used to caulk ships' hulls, was even traded for tracts of land in the Dorchester township in the 1720s.

Rice soon exceeded in value all other exports from South Carolina. "One acre of good rice is profitable as two or three acres of English grain," wrote a Carolina planter in 1712. Commercial cultivation of rice brought riches and social advancement to many planters along the upper Ashley, and it offered the hope of greater wealth and status for many tradesmen and small farmers who aspired to become planters.

But rice cultivation had its costs. Planters accumulated more and more land for rice growing, scattering settlement throughout the lowcountry. In 1728 there were only some twenty families living within a two-mile radius of Dorchester. Beyond that distance, settlers were even more dispersed. Rice was subject to the whims of nature, just like any other crop. Many planters in St. George's Parish, relying on their rice crops to meet payments to Charlestown merchants, found themselves deeply in debt after several successive crop failures in the 1720s.

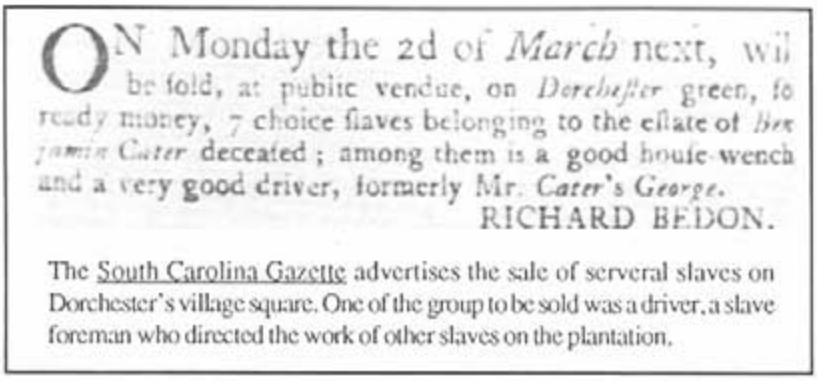
Commercial rice cultivation also carried with it severe health hazards. Rice was planted in cleared inland swamps that were periodically inundated with water. Collected in impoundments behind low dams, the water germinated seeds, killed weeds and insects, and supported growing stalks of rice. The flooded fields and open impoundments became breeding grounds for mosquitoes, and mosquitoes transmitted malaria. Carolinians knew that the disease struck with deadly force during the rice growing season, but they mistakenly attributed its cause to noxious vapors rising off the fields and swamps.

Black Labor

Large-scale rice cultivation also increased Carolina planters' reliance on slave labor. By 1708 black slaves outnumbered whites in South Carolina. The earliest English settlers to Carolina had brought African slaves with them; those settlers were well acquainted with slavery and its profitability. Two additional considerations apart from profit might have played a role in the growth of African slavery in colonial South Carolina. Some slaves, particularly those taken from the west coast of Africa, may have been imported because they were already familiar with rice, having cultivated the crop in their homeland. The British colonists also may have observed that Africans exhibited a partial immunity to malaria, which could have further fueled the white settlers' demand for slaves.

Five hundred and thirty-six slaves lived in St. George's Parish in 1720, with the number of whites estimated at 340. Six years later the white population had grown to 537 while the slave population had climbed to 1300, or about seventy percent of the total. Anglicans and dissenters alike

owned slaves in 1726. About four households in every five owned slaves, but most possessed only a few. Shoemaker Joseph Griffen owned two slaves. Job Chamberlain, a local shipwright, had eleven. The majority of the parish's slaves--two thirds of them--were concentrated on a few plantations that counted twenty-five or more slaves in their work forces.


ON Monday the 2d of *March* next, will be ſold, at public vendue, on *Dorcheſter* green, for ready money, 7 choice ſlaves belonging to the eſtate of *Benjamin Cater* deceaſed; among them is a good houſe-wench and a very good driver, formerly Mr. *Cater's George*.

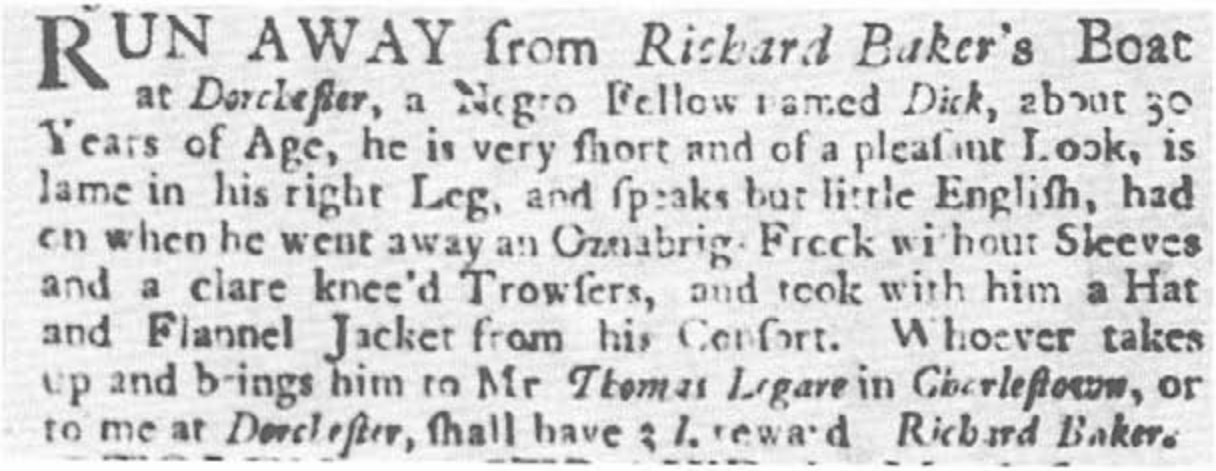
RICHARD BEDON.

The South Carolina Gazette advertises the sale of serveral slaves on Dorchester's village square. One of the group to be sold was a driver, a slave foreman who directed the work of other slaves on the plantation.

The number of slaves in the parish grew as planters expanded their operations to increase their profits. By 1741, 3347 slaves lived in the parish; the white population, meanwhile, had decreased to 468. Slaves now constituted nearly 88 percent of the population of St. George's.

This large and potentially hostile slave population kept the white residents of the upper Ashley wary and vigilant. Rev. Varnod baptized some slaves, but most masters opposed his efforts because they feared that Christian slaves would spend their Sundays not in prayer but plotting mischief and hatching conspiracies. An attempted uprising in St. George's Parish in 1720 and a bloody insurrection in St. Paul's in 1739 proved that rebellion was a very real possibility. Slaves found guilty of this and other crimes were speedily and often brutally punished. Nathaniel Wickham's slave Sampson was whipped and branded for an unspecified crime in 1743. The following year one of Joseph Blake's slaves was hanged in chains near the village for trying to poison his master. In 1751 the baptism of slaves stopped in St. George's because several bondsmen had poisoned their masters and overseers. Five or six slaves were condemned to death for their complicity in this plot.

Despite their fears, whites in and around Dorchester continued to rely on black slaves for labor in the fields as well as skilled work in plantation and village shops. Some slaves made barrels to carry their masters' rice crops. A few, such as Samuel Stevens' slave Little Toney, piloted the boats that shipped the rice to market. Little Toney's abilities as a boatman were so well regarded that only one other slave on the plantation, a seamstress named Peggy, had an equal value.


RUN AWAY from *Richard Baker's* Boat at *Dorcheſter*, a Negro Fellow named *Dick*, about 30 Years of Age, he is very ſhort and of a pleaſant Look, is lame in his right Leg, and ſpeaks but little Engliſh, had on when he went away an Osnabrig Frock without Sleeves and a clare knee'd Trowſers, and took with him a Hat and Flannel Jacket from his Comfort. Whoever takes up and brings him to Mr *Thomas Legare* in *Charleſtown*, or to me at *Dorcheſter*, ſhall have a *L.* reward *Richard Baker.*

Running away was a common form of resistance among slaves. Richard Baker's runaway could be quickly identified with this detailed description. The fact that Dick spoke little English points to the likelihood that he was born in Africa.

The Pleasantest Spot of Ground in the Settlements

The village of Dorchester was well situated to take advantage of the growing slave-based plantation economy. Roads on both sides of the Ashley River (present-day State Highway 61 on the south side and State Highway 642 on the north) connected Dorchester with the capital at Charlestown. Another road just below the village (present Ladson Road) linked it to the settlements along Goose Creek. Bridges spanned the Ashley River and its tributary creeks. Built in the 1720s, the 150-foot-long Dorchester Bridge crossed the Ashley at one of the town's major streets. In 1744

Durable periaguas, the common craft of the Indian and plantation trades, were easily built with readily available materials. Hollowed-out cypress logs formed their hulls.

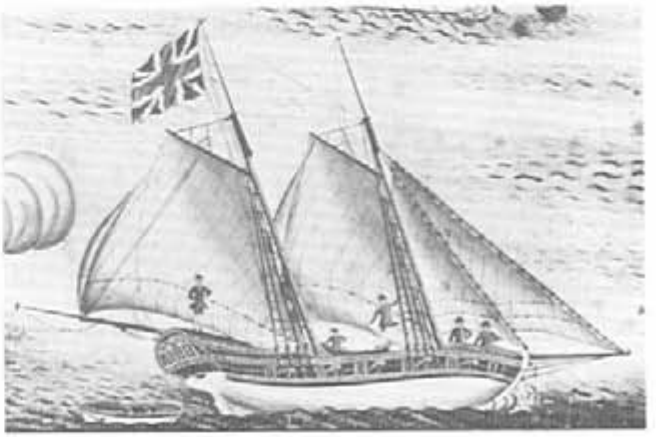
this bridge and five others, including a span across Bossoe Creek near the village, became parish bridges subject to repair at the expense of all the parish's male inhabitants, free and slave, between the ages of sixteen and sixty.

Most important to Dorchester's role as a "place of trade" was its location at the head of navigation of the Ashley River. Vessels of over one hundred tons burden could sail up the river as far as Dorchester. Manufactured items and slaves were shipped from Charlestown to the village, and bundles of deerskins and barrels of rice were transported downstream to the colonial capital.

Periaguas such as those used in the Indian trade were commonly employed to ship the commodities produced on the riverside plantations, but larger, more traditional vessels also plied the Ashley. Schooners--flat-bottomed, shallow-draft ships that mounted two masts--carried cargo up and down Carolina's navigable rivers and along the colony's coastline. Several schooners were built at Dorchester. They ranged in capacity from the thirty-ton *Nancy* and the twenty-ton *Live Oak* to the little six-ton *House Carpenter*, owned by James Rousham, a Dorchester carpenter. (Rousham's little ship might have been merely a periagua rigged as a schooner.)

Schooners and periaguas docked at the log wharves that jutted into the Ashley from the town lots above the river. The wharves were most likely at their busiest in the fall when planters brought in their produce to trade with local merchants. In exchange for rice and other crops, merchants offered manufactured goods, liquor, and slaves. They provided planters with storehouses to hold their rice and vessels to ship it to Charlestown. The merchants extended credit and circulated money in the form of various promissory notes. Transactions between merchants and planters probably occurred on several of Dorchester's riverside lots, such as lot 9, where Samuel Stone's storehouses stood adjacent to the wharf and public landing.

In 1723 the colonial legislature established weekly markets and spring and fall fairs in Dorchester to promote trade in the village. The markets were to be held every Tuesday and Saturday. The four-day fairs were to begin on the



To navigate South Carolina's coastal rivers, schooners like this had to draw less than six feet of water. Local shipwrights such as Job Chamberlain and John Drake possibly built schooners and periaguas near the mouth of Bossoe Creek at a spot identified on the town map as "The Building Place."

Dorchester's cribwork log wharves, one of which is shown here in a conjectural reconstruction, apparently were a response to local geology: A rock-hard marl river bottom made driving piles a difficult, if not impossible, task.

second Tuesday of April and the first Tuesday of October. "All sorts of cattle, horses, mares, colts, grain, victuals, provision, and other necessaries" were to be sold or bartered. No taxes were to be charged at the markets and fairs for their first three years. Afterward toll takers were to assess a sales tax of two shillings and six pence for livestock sold and ten shillings for every slave sold. It was hoped that increased trade would stimulate the growth of Dorchester. Five years after the passage of the law creating the markets and fairs, however, Rev. Varnod complained that the parish continued to be "in some measure a frontier to the Province." And although he believed the village of Dorchester to be "the Pleasantest spot of Ground in the Settlements," he counted no more than six families residing there.

Dorchester was still only partially settled in the early 1740s. The town's population was small but diverse. Some of its residents were professionals, such as William Davidson, a physician who lived in a large house on lots 108 and 109, and Mrs. Henry Fletcher, considered one of the best midwives in all of South Carolina. Others were artisans, such as Edward Vanvelson, a tanner who owned lots 74, 75, 76, and 77 near Bossoe Creek. Vanvelson's son-in-law, carpenter James Rousham, lived on lots 78 and 79 nearby.

Many more people lived outside the village in homes scattered up and down the river. Some were tradesmen who apparently found sufficient work beyond the bounds of the village or were drawn into the country by the prospects of profit and prestige that came with successful rice planting. In 1735 a local blacksmith named Thomas Baker willed lot 22 in Dorchester to his son Andrew. But Baker had been living on a 130-acre tract of land on the river, not on that quarter-acre lot in town.

Merchants also set up shop outside of Dorchester, trading directly with the riverside plantations as easily as merchants within the village could. Thomas and Jacob Satur, in partnership with two Charlestown merchants, ran a store on the river above Dorchester in the 1720s. Two decades later Charlestown merchant Isaac Holmes operated storehouses at Bacon's Bridge, about two miles upriver from the village.

Richard Walter promised the latest from London at his Dorchester store in 1766. Artifacts discovered by archaeologists at Dorchester reveal the variety of wares found in the town's houses and shops. Clockwise from left: German stoneware bottle, English wine bottle and bottle neck, German-made Westerwald stoneware mug, English Staffordshire candlestick.

The Appearance of Affluence and Luxury: The Look of Colonial Dorchester

What did Dorchester look like? The town plan, preserved in a map drawn in 1742, is clear enough. The size and appearance of the actual village that developed on that plan is much less certain.

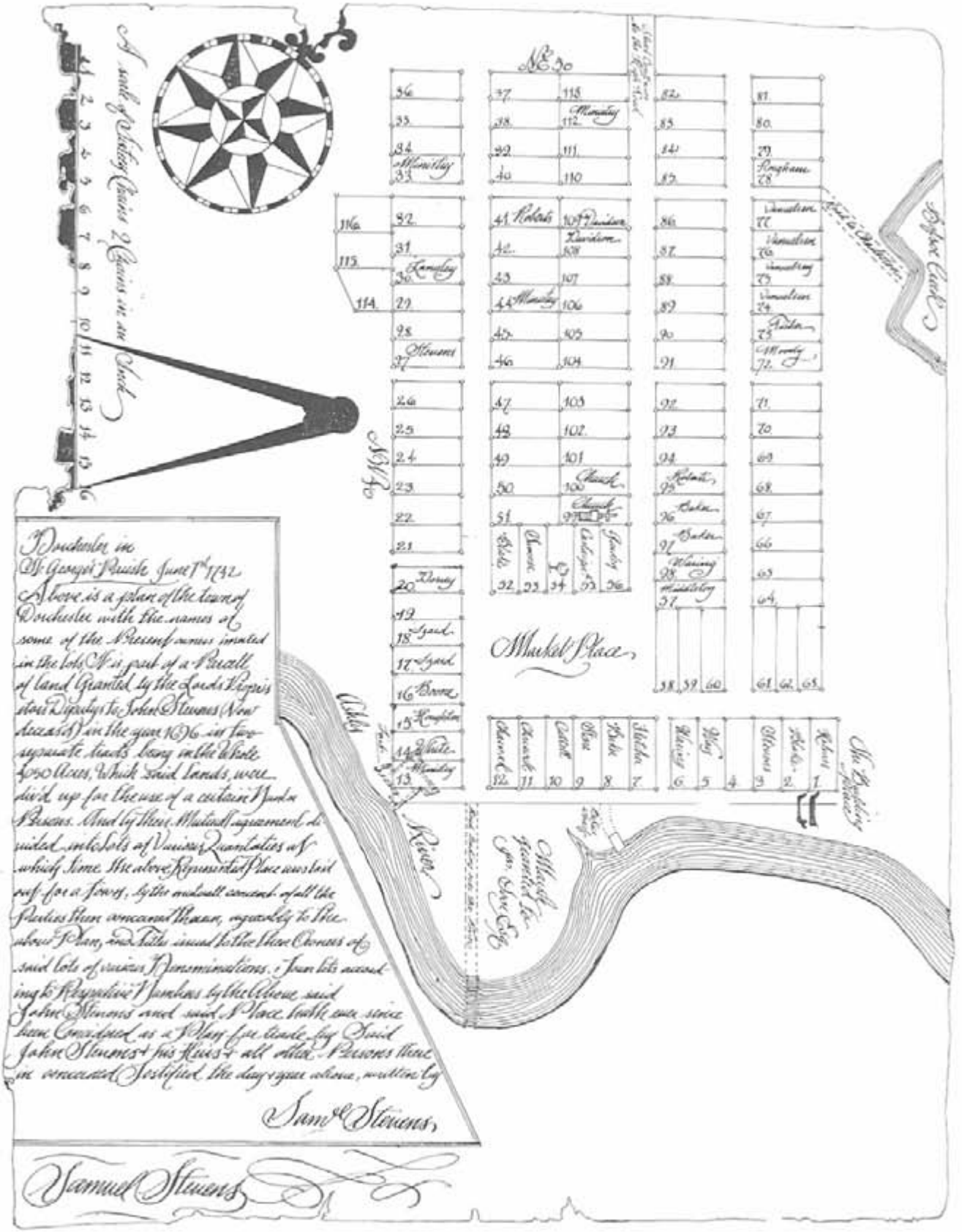
No accurate population figures for the village exist. In a 1708 account of Britain's North American colonies, writer John Oldmixon claimed that Dorchester was home to "about 350 Souls." A prominent modern historian assessed Oldmixon's many mistakes and concluded that the man had never even visited South Carolina. Bits and pieces of more reliable information indicate that Dorchester remained a mere village throughout its history. Rev. Francis Varnod asserted that only six families lived in Dorchester in 1728. The 1742 map hints that the town had grown in the fourteen years since Varnod's statement but was still fairly small. The map identifies only twenty-six individual owners who possessed fewer than half the town's lots. The Anglican Church owned two lots (those marked "Church"), and the Congregational Church held four (those designated "Ministry"). Some of the town's 116 lots apparently were unclaimed. Of the property owners named on the map, several were absentee owners who held the lots as investments. One historian's oft-repeated claim that Dorchester was the third-largest town in South Carolina on the eve of the Revolutionary War cannot be substantiated and is almost certainly incorrect. Contemporary descriptions present sketchy views of a minor country town. In 1779 an author familiar with South Carolina dismissed Dorchester as one of several villages unworthy of attention compared to the colonial capital at Charlestown. Marching through Dorchester with a British column in April 1780, Lt. Anthony Allaire observed "about forty houses and a church."

Few descriptions are left of the buildings that Allaire saw, even of such a large public structure as St. George's Church. The dimensions of the original brick sanctuary are known, but the extent of its subsequent enlargement is not. It may be that the renovated church was cruciform in plan, for visitors to the site in the 1850s and 1870s remarked that scavengers had dug a cross-shaped trench behind the church tower to remove foundation bricks. The tower is now the only visible remnant of the church.

A piece of old Dorchester in Charleston? That's what the author of a letter to the Charleston News and Courier claimed in 1959. The house was said to have been built in Dorchester and then dismantled and rebuilt at its present location in Charleston on the corner of Smith and Wentworth streets. The double porch is a later addition.

Even less remains of the homes of Dorchester's residents. A few foundations and some random piles of rubble are all that can be seen on the surface of the ground. Educated conjecture provides an impression of how the houses might have looked.

Dorchester's houses were surely similar to



Dorchester projects an orderly appearance of neat lots and parallel and perpendicular streets in the 1742 town map. St. George's Church stood on lot 99. Built after the map was drawn, the fort occupied lot 13--land once owned by the Congregational Church. The fort appears as an outline on this version of the map, adapted from the original.

those of other English colonists of the time. Some were wooden, framed with heavy hewn timbers, covered with sawn clapboards, and roofed with split shingles. Using clay to make bricks and oyster shells to make lime mortar, some settlers erected more substantial masonry homes. Many early houses were probably of the traditional hall-and-parlor plan, characterized by two large, multipurpose rooms, sometimes with a loft above and a lean-to extension at the rear. Some Dorchester homes built or remodeled from the mid-1700s on undoubtedly displayed elements of the new Georgian style of architecture. Charlesworth Glover's plantation house about a mile from the village might have presented an early version of the symmetrical floor plan favored in Georgian design. Offered for sale in 1733, Glover's two-story house was forty-five feet long by thirty-five feet wide and boasted of four rooms per floor. Gillson Clapp's brick house on lot 10 in the village may have been arranged like a Charleston single house--one room wide and several rooms deep. Clapp's house measured forty feet long by thirty feet wide, had three rooms "and other conveniencies" to a floor and stood above "very good Cellars."

Unfortunately, the few descriptions of houses in the Dorchester area, such as those of Glover's plantation and Clapp's house, reveal little about the structures. James Clatworthy's "neat Dwelling House" of six painted and plastered rooms near Dorchester is just another example of a passing reference that provides no more than a glimpse at a building.

Some of Dorchester's homes were impressive residences, as Capt. John Peebles of the British army discovered. Entering Dorchester with a patrol in May of 1780, Peebles found that "every house has the appearance (tho' deserted) of the Inhabitants having lived in affluence & luxury." Peebles' assessment of the town was an obvious exaggeration; some of Dorchester's buildings were certainly dwellings of a more humble sort.

In addition to houses and the church, numerous outbuildings stood on Dorchester's lots. Kitchens, outhouses, stables, and carriage sheds clustered around the homes, with occasional wells, gardens, and fences occupying more space. Warehouses where rice was stored and shops where merchants peddled goods and artisans practiced their trades completed the scene of the colonial village on the Ashley River.

Future examinations of the town lots by archaeologists and historians may uncover more details about the town's buildings and thus present a clearer picture of Dorchester. Until then, our image of the colonial village will remain indistinct.

A Removal of the Whole Society Seemed Advisable

The staple crop economy of the Ashley River had a tremendous effect on the Congregationalists. The original Dorchester settlers had migrated to South Carolina as part of a tightly knit congregation. Half a century later their descendants were being scattered by the same centrifugal forces that dispersed settlement throughout the lowcountry.

Gradually it became apparent that the forty-five- and fifty-acre farm lots of the Congregationalists' township were too small to be divided for the support of succeeding generations. Repeated cultivation of the lots also resulted in the loss of their fertility. Some Congregationalists acquired land across the river about eight miles from Dorchester in an area called Beach Hill, where they built a separate meeting house in 1737. But the Beach Hill settlement did not solve the land shortage problem, and younger members of the church continued to leave the township in search of new land. With members of their church scattered across a wide region, the Congregationalists worried that their religious community would disintegrate. They also came to the conclusion that the site they had settled was decidedly unhealthy. "Upon these considerations," according to church records, "a removal of the whole Society seemed advisable."

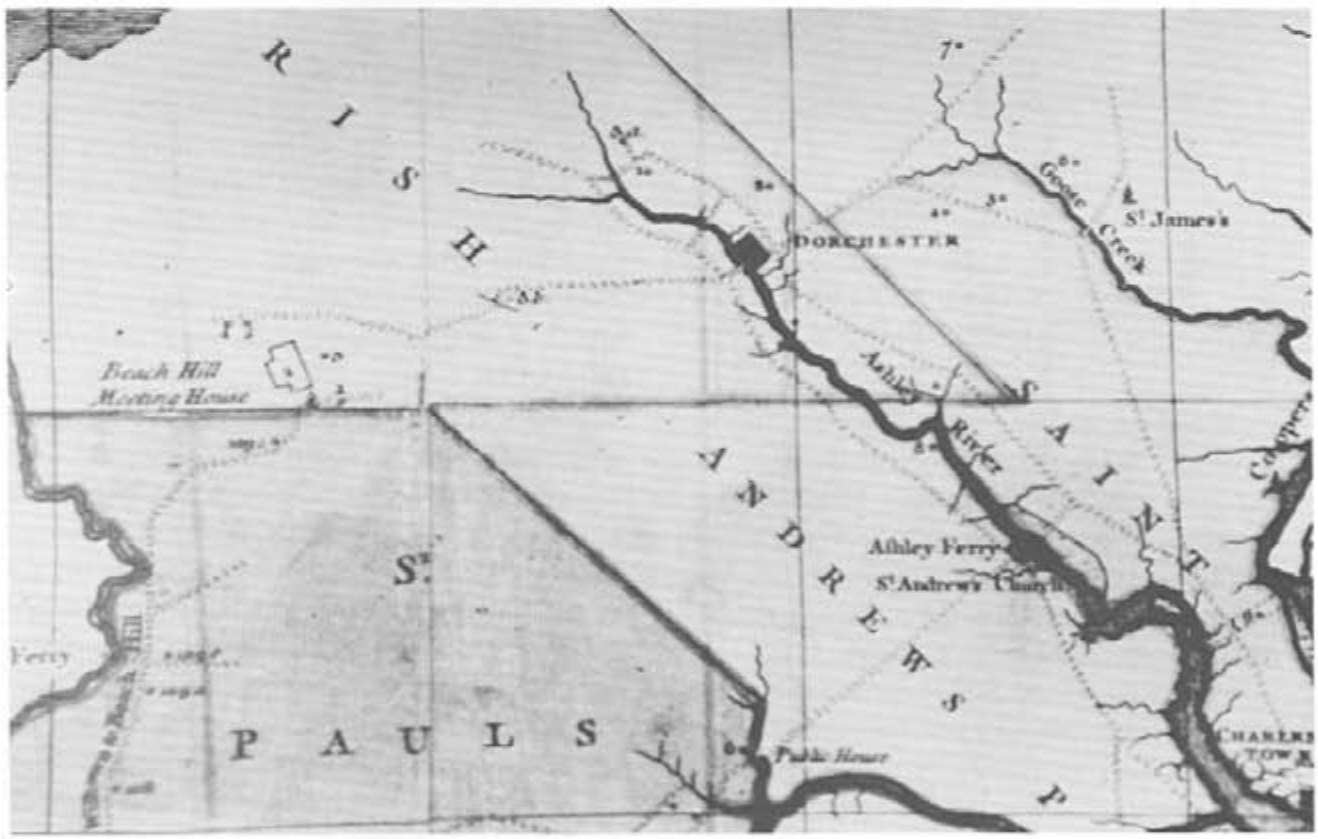
One consideration went unstated. The Congregationalists had discovered that the farm lots

of their New England-style township were too small for the profitable cultivation of rice in the Carolina lowcountry. They wanted to keep their community together in a compact settlement, but they needed sufficient land to maintain the rice-planting society they had embraced. Unable to find enough suitable land in South Carolina, they looked to Georgia. In the 1750s the nearby colony eased its land policies to permit the accumulation of large tracts of property and repealed its ban on slavery.

Favorable reports of the area near the Midway River on the Georgia coast brought numerous requests by the Congregationalists for land there. They received two grants for nearly 32,000 acres in 1752 and launched a gradual migration that continued to 1761. In Georgia the Congregationalists created a community much like the one their ancestors had envisioned in South Carolina--an agricultural community centered around an orderly market village and the Congregational church. Large, contiguous tracts of land gave them enough acreage to profitably grow rice and ensure the security of future generations. The low swampy land they chose in Georgia was ideal for growing rice, but it was also as unhealthy as the land they had left. The large impoundments of standing water required in rice cultivation would make the region even more sickly.

The Dorchester settlement did not collapse with the departure of the Congregationalists. Anglicans remained in the parish and continued to thrive. They had already added a large, stylish tower and steeple to their church in 1751. Shortly afterward they began taking pledges to purchase bells. The wealth of the parish was evident several years later to a traveling minister who described St. George's as "a very handsome Brick Church, with a Steeple, 4 Bells, and an Organ."

St. George's Parish also supported a school. The legislature authorized the creation of a parish school in 1724, but the institution promoted so vigorously by Rev. Varnod did not become a reality until the late 1750s. A new school commission appointed by the legislature built a brick school



A scarcity of land in the Dorchester township drove some Congregationalists to Beach Hill, about eight miles from the village. There, in 1737, they erected a meeting house, pictured on this map published 20 years later.

Despite the departure of the Congregationalists in the 1750s, Dorchester and the surrounding countryside continued to thrive. Many large plantations stood along the river, as this map of the late colonial period attests.

house and a schoolmaster's residence in the village in 1758. With the support of donations and bequests, the Dorchester Free School began to educate area children. The school was free in a very limited sense. By law the institution was to accept ten or more poor scholars for free education; all other students were to pay tuition.

The village of Dorchester still attracted merchants, artisans, and professionals to serve the Ashley River community. The ranks of the local craftsmen even included a wigmaker, William Hamilton, in 1756. Some townspeople were quite wealthy. At his death in 1774 Dr. Archibald McNeill left personal property and slaves valued at over £28,000. His book collection alone was worth £700. Included among his many possessions were portraits of himself, his wife, and his two children painted by well-known Charlestown artist Jeremiah Theus. Alexander Fotheringham, like his good friend McNeill, also was a physician. In the 1770s he lived in a house in Dorchester on lots 108 and 109, the same town lots where another physician, Dr. William Davidson, had lived some thirty years before. Fotheringham's house contained several pieces of mahogany furniture, silver and china worth £700, and such finery as a gold-headed cane, silver-mounted pistols, and a number of volumes in a painted bookcase.

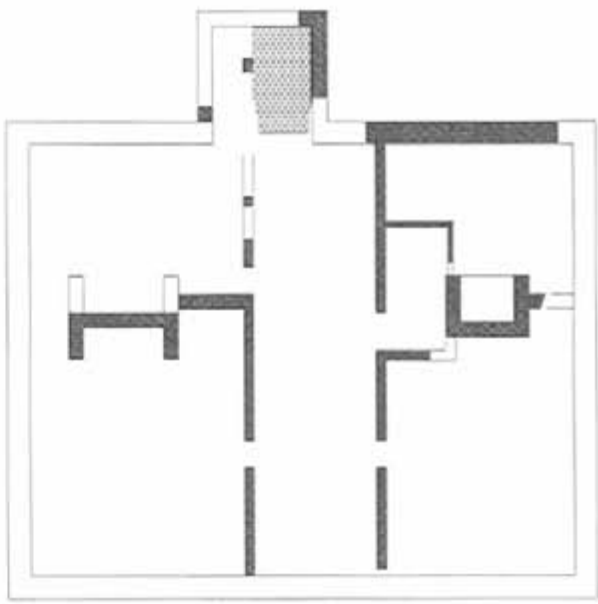
A Look into the Past:
The Archaeological Investigation of a Dorchester House

The excavation of a house site gives archaeologists the opportunity to look into the past. By examining the remains of a dwelling, they can draw conclusions about its construction and use and develop theories about its occupants and their behavior. Archaeologists investigated a house site at the park in the fall and winter of 1993. Their findings added to our knowledge of Dorchester and provided a general impression of at least one house that stood in the village.

Work on the site began long before any dirt was turned. In February 1991 ground-penetrating radar showed what appeared to be a building foundation below the surface some two hundred feet northwest of the fort on lot 17. Historical research established that lot 17 and the adjoining lot 18 belonged to four generations of the wealthy Izard family through most of the 1700s. A house stood on the land by 1750, when Walter Izard willed his two lots in Dorchester with "my Dwelling house & all other Improvements thereon" to his son Ralph. The state of South Carolina confiscated the lots near the end of the Revolutionary War because the husband of the last Izard to own the land was a prominent and active loyalist. Elizabeth Izard Wright and Alexander Wright later filed a claim with the British government requesting compensation for their lost property, including the two lots in Dorchester. On those lots was a wooden house on a brick foundation that the couple had rented out for £250 per year.

Archaeologists began to excavate the site in September 1993, methodically uncovering the remains of a brick foundation from a large structure measuring forty-three feet by thirty-five feet. The bricks outlined a cellar dug between two and three feet below the surface. (An inventory of Walter Izard's Dorchester estate referred to a cellar at his house.) The cellar's walls originally rose perhaps four feet or more above grade to allow sufficient headroom. A brick-floored entryway led into the cellar from outside the rear of the house. Partition walls divided the cellar into several rooms, each with a floor of hard-packed clay. Plastered bricks in some sections of the cellar and traces of what may have been a fireplace in one room raised the possibility that the basement had served as work or living space, maybe for some of the slaves of the white residents.

The newly-exposed foundation also suggested the floor plan of the rooms above the cellar. The house conformed to the early Georgian style of architecture, with four rooms in a roughly symmetrical arrangement around a central hallway. Two large rooms at the front of the house may have



The foundation of a four-room structure with a central hall is revealed in this drawing of the Izard house on lot 17. A brick-floored cellar entrance projects from the rear of the foundation. Chimney bases appear as H- and U-shaped features on either side of the hallway. Darkened lines represent foundations that remain in the soil; open lines indicate areas where scavengers had removed foundation bricks or where archaeologists inferred their location.

been the hall and parlor mentioned in Walter Izard's inventory. The remains of chimney bases on either side of the hallway showed that there were two chimneys in the house, their stacks poking through the roof just behind the ridge line. The chimneys supplied the four rooms on each floor with separate fireplaces.

An image of how the house on lot 17 might have looked is shown above. This conjectural drawing is based on both the remains found at the site and on some of the general features of 18th-century South Carolina architecture.

A mental image of the house emerged as the excavation progressed. Like other eighteenth-century South Carolina houses with similar floor plans, this one probably stood two stories high. The structure was most likely built out of wood. The archaeologists reasoned that a brick house would have left more rubble than they found. Even though scavengers obviously had taken away bricks from the foundation, the archaeologists also reasoned that many more broken bricks would have resulted from an attempt to salvage building materials from the house if it had been constructed entirely of brick. Large amounts of white plaster and fragments of glass were evidence of a house with plastered interiors and plenty of windows. The absence of clay roofing tiles suggested that wooden shingles covered the building.

Artifacts recovered in the excavation offered clues about the people who lived in the house. Dating from the 1700s, the artifacts included such items as gaming pieces and silver buttons, signs of the wealth and high social status of the building's occupants. Pieces of ceramic and glass pharmaceutical bottles hinted that a physician may have been on the site. In 1786 a man testifying before the British government on behalf of the loyalist claim of Alexander Wright and Elizabeth Izard Wright recalled that Dr. Archibald McNeill had lived in the Wrights' house at Dorchester. During the excavation archaeologists discovered parts of two bottles embossed with the name A. McNeill. The bottle fragments pointed to McNeill's presence on the property and lent weight to the conclusion that the house being investigated was indeed the Izard house described in the historical record.

A fragment of a glass bottle found in the excavation provides a link to a resident of the village. Dorchester physician Archibald McNeill lived for a time in the house on this site. He was wealthy enough to have his wine bottles personalized.

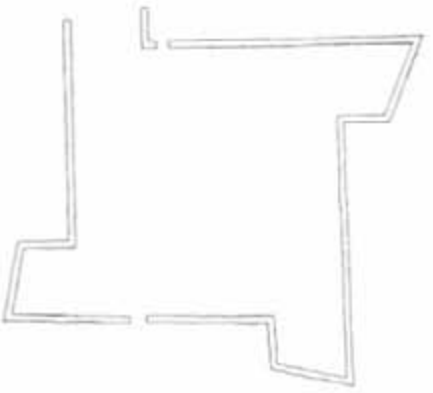
What happened to this large house? It apparently did not burn down for there was little evidence of a major fire. This house, like others in town, simply may have been dismantled for its materials. Most of the bricks from the foundation had been pried loose and removed by scavengers, leaving only the remnants of the structure under a layer of broken bricks and bits of plaster. Continued analysis of the features and artifacts of lot 17 will surely reveal more about this house and more about life in the colonial village of Dorchester.

Secure Against an Enemy

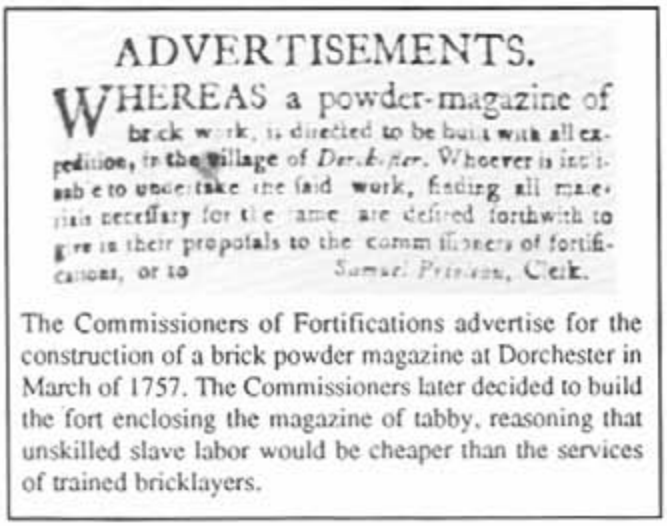
By the mid-1700s the upper Ashley was no longer the frontier it had been a generation before, when Indian traders conducted business from their plantations with neighboring tribes. But the recurring wars for control of the North American continent periodically evoked the specter of attack by Indians and their French or Spanish allies. Rumors of an impending French naval invasion in the winter of 1756-1757 led Gov. William Henry Lyttelton to quickly assess the colony's security. Only one public powder magazine existed in South Carolina, and it was located in Charlestown. If Charlestown were to fall in an attack, the colony's supply of munitions would be lost and all of South Carolina would be in jeopardy. Lyttelton was convinced that a magazine in the interior of the colony was needed. So on January 25, 1757, he urged the Commons House of Assembly to authorize the construction of a new powder magazine.

Two days after the delivery of the governor's message, the legislature agreed to build an enclosed magazine at Dorchester and to post a guard there of six or eight men. In February Gov. Lyttelton instructed the Commissioners of Fortifications to build a powder magazine in Dorchester and to "secure it against an Enemy."

The commissioners ordered the construction of a brick magazine but chose a different material for the walls of the fort enclosing it. The fort was to be made of tabby, a concrete-like mixture of oyster shells, lime, and sand. Thousands of bushels of oyster shells were brought up the Ashley River to the construction site on a bluff above the river at the southern corner of the village. The tabby walls of the fort, standing eight feet high and over two feet thick, formed a rectangle more than one hundred feet square with half-bastions projecting from each corner. The inward-angled faces of the half-bastions allowed defenders of the fort to fire down the length of the adjacent walls. In the center of the fortification stood the brick powder magazine, partially buried to minimize damage from any accidental explosion.



The plan of Dorchester's fort reveals a European design simplified for North American conditions. Its simple layout allowed for easy construction--an important consideration in a region that lacked trained military engineers. The plan shows an opening where the face of the southeast bastion is missing.



ADVERTISEMENTS.

WHEREAS a powder-magazine of brick work, is directed to be built with all expedition, in the village of *Dorchester*. Whoever is inclinable to undertake the said work, finding all materials necessary for the same are desired forthwith to give in their proposals to the commissioners of fortifications, or to *Samuel Prioleau*, Clerk.

The Commissioners of Fortifications advertise for the construction of a brick powder magazine at Dorchester in March of 1757. The Commissioners later decided to build the fort enclosing the magazine of tabby, reasoning that unskilled slave labor would be cheaper than the services of trained bricklayers.

Work on the fort continued for three years. Then in May of 1760 the Commissioners of Fortifications diverted the remaining funds from the Dorchester project to military construction elsewhere in the colony. The dire threats that had driven the erection of the little fort presumably had dissipated by this time. In 1768 local planter John Skene willed his "great guns" to the Commissioners of Fortifications for use at Dorchester. Skene's will, however, allowed the officers of a local militia troop the right to use the guns on holidays, particularly the king's birthday and the feast day of St. George.

Tabby: As Fresh and Hard as Newly Cut Granite

From a distance the fort at Dorchester looks as if it is made of modern poured concrete. A closer examination reveals oyster shells in its walls, indicating that it is made of tabby. A concrete-like mixture of shells, lime, and sand, tabby was a popular masonry building material along the southeastern coast in the mid-1700s.

Tabby construction originated in the Spanish colony of Florida. There centuries-old Spanish and North African building techniques were combined with locally available shells to create a new building material. From Florida the use of tabby spread to the British colonies of South Carolina and Georgia.

Tabby boxes--little more than planks held together with wooden pins and pegs--served as molds for the poured tabby mixture. A 19th-century expert on tabby found that a slave could mix and mold 120 cubic feet of tabby per week.

The process of erecting a tabby structure was relatively simple. First, oyster shells were burned to obtain lime. Then equal volumes of lime, oyster shells, sand, and water were mixed and poured into forms. The forms, or tabby "boxes," were merely planks held together with wooden pins and pegs at the desired thickness of the wall. A number of boxes were connected until the entire perimeter of the structure was outlined with the forms. Tabby was poured into the boxes and allowed to harden, forming one course, or "round." The boxes were then removed and reassembled on top of the first round, and a second round of tabby was poured. A tabby building thus rose in successive layers. The holes left by the pins from the tabby boxes were backfilled with mortar and pieces of brick, and then the walls of the structure were stuccoed to keep them clean and waterproof and to prevent people from cutting themselves on the rough edges of protruding shells.

Tabby was an inexpensive alternative to brick. Its raw materials were ready at hand, and its simple construction method allowed the use of cheap, unskilled labor instead of the trained masons needed when building in brick. Slaves often provided the labor. A skilled foreman was needed to supervise the work, though. A local planter named John Joor was originally hired to oversee the construction of the fort at Dorchester, but the Commissioners of Fortifications soon replaced him with another man after finding Joor to be inexperienced in the work. (Joor is buried in the graveyard near the church tower.)

A close look at the fort shows the layers of tabby and the oyster shells that make up the material. Carolinians commonly excavated old Indian shell mounds for the thousands of bushels of shells required in tabby construction.

Experience with tabby and a knowledge of its structural properties were indeed required of a construction superintendent. For despite its apparent strength, tabby is a relatively weak masonry. And because it is molded in layers, it is often weakest between rounds. Walls tend to crack and sometimes break where one round meets another. The fact that the walls of the fort are still standing is a testament to the builder's skill with a sometimes difficult material.

Today the Dorchester fort is remarkably well preserved. A major earthquake in 1886 cracked its walls but did not destroy them. A visitor to the fort after the quake found the tabby walls "as fresh and hard as newly cut granite." The only breach in the walls was man-made: The face of the southeast bastion was broken down, apparently to allow wagons into the fort so scavengers could remove bricks from the powder magazine.

This Wanton Rebellion

The American Revolution brought new threats and renewed activity to Dorchester in the summer and fall of 1775. Legislative records were moved from Charlestown to Dorchester for safekeeping. And as South Carolina prepared for war with Great Britain, the little town was transformed into a military depot and was soon swarming with local militiamen.

Fearing that loyalists from the upcountry might descend on the town and take the gunpowder, cannons, and other supplies stored there, the provincial congress ordered reinforcements to Dorchester. Two companies of the 2nd South Carolina Regiment under the command of Capt. Francis Marion marched to Dorchester to bolster its militia garrison. Storehouses were converted into makeshift barracks as more militiamen rendezvoused in the village. Late in November the parish revolutionary committee was told to obtain enough provisions to maintain one thousand soldiers for a month. Portions of three county militia regiments gathered at Dorchester shortly after in response to another perceived threat from armed upcountry loyalists.

Capt. Francis Marion took command of Dorchester's garrison when he reinforced the troops in the village with two companies of soldiers in November 1775. Later in the war Marion became famous as the "Swamp Fox" for his hit-and-run attacks on the British forces occupying the state.

The local committee received

The sight of several young ladies leaving St. George's Church distracted Capt. William Richardson from the letter he was writing his wife on May 19, 1776. "Sad sweet huzzies they interrupt me," he wrote. "I must gaze at them a little."

authority to hire or impress slaves, horses, wagons, carts, a schooner--anything necessary--to prepare the town's defensive works. Meanwhile, Lt. Col. Owen Roberts of the 1st South Carolina Regiment was detailed to make the fort capable of withstanding any sudden attack. (The bricks seen today along the top of the fort's west wall are possibly remnants from this feverish preparation for war.) Roberts was given wide latitude to alter or reject plans then being drawn up to make the entire village "a strong armed post." Even St. George's Church was to be fortified according to a scheme adopted in January of 1776.

The threats to Dorchester's safety diminished through the spring and summer of 1776, as did the sense of urgency that accompanied the fortification of the town. Troops posted at Dorchester seemed to suffer mostly from the boredom that afflicts soldiers in camp. Fortunately, the people of Dorchester were friendly. "I find all agreeable," wrote Capt. William Richardson of the 1st Regiment. "The people seem to take pains to make us happy."

Small detachments guarded the magazine at Dorchester, but the town felt no real danger until the British launched a series of campaigns in the South. American soldiers assembled at Dorchester before marching to the defense of Charlestown when that city came under attack in 1779 and again in 1780. In the spring of 1780 British forces laying siege to the capital passed through Dorchester to cut off the Americans' last avenue of escape. A British captain who led a forage party into Dorchester after Charlestown surrendered found the village abandoned: "every house has the appearance (tho' deserted) of the Inhabitants having lived in affluence & luxury, but this wanton Rebellion has broke in upon their pleasures, & their comforts too, & reduced many wealthy people to shifting circumstances, & the poor negroes to a starving condition in many places hereabout." The war had finally come to Dorchester.

A British soldier's button found by archaeologists at Dorchester conjures up images of dull garrison duty and hard campaigning.The 30th Regiment arrived in South Carolina in the summer of 1781 to take part in some of the last actions of the war.

Weighed down by equipment worn over his scarlet woolen coat, a soldier of the 30th Regiment swelters in the Carolina heat. Troops of the 30th were distinguished from men in other British units by the pale yellow facings and sky-blue and white buttonhole lace of their coats.

Gen. Nathanael Greene systematically captured British outposts in South Carolina, including Dorchester. "We wounded and took prisoners about twenty or thirty in the different skirmishes," he wrote after Dorchester fell to his troops in December 1781, "and all their horse had a narrow escape."

The tide of the war turned in favor of the Americans late in 1780. By the summer of 1781, British forces in South Carolina were on the defensive. Patriot cavalry commanded by Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee raided Dorchester in early July, but the British had abandoned the village, leaving only some horses and wagons and a wagon-load of ammunition for Lee to capture. British soldiers soon reoccupied Dorchester, and by November they had strengthened their position with an earthen redoubt just below the town. But American forces under Nathanael Greene bore down on the village, hoping to surprise its garrison of some 400 infantry, 150 cavalry, and an unknown number of loyalist militia. The British learned of Greene's advance, however, and on December 1 sent a loyalist patrol from the town to find the approaching patriot force. The patrol ran headfirst into Greene's vanguard, the cavalry of Col. Wade Hampton. Hampton's troopers charged the patrol and drove it back into the village with heavy casualties. British horsemen rode out from Dorchester to counter the Americans but quickly retreated without a fight in the face of Hampton's advance. Fearing a general attack, the British troops destroyed their supplies and evacuated the town that night. The following day in his camp near Dorchester, Nathanael Greene sarcastically described his enemy's departure. "The British Army," he wrote, "are very respectful." But the British had burned St. George's Church and the free school buildings, and they probably left other structures in town similarly wrecked.

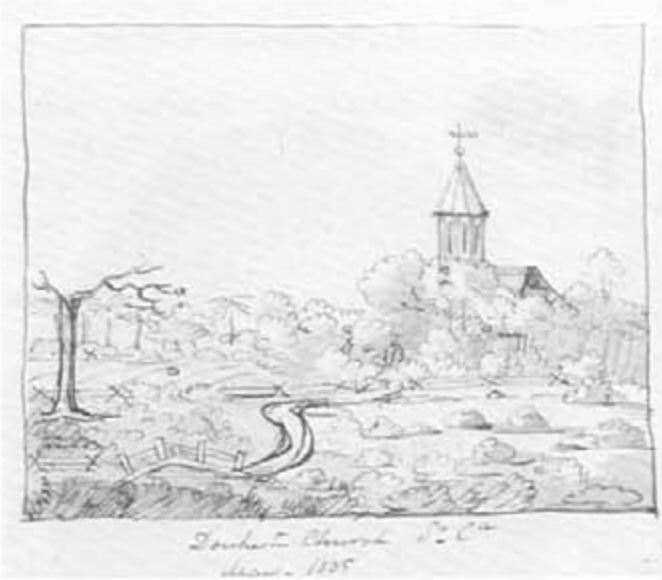
During the remainder of the war, Dorchester stood in a no-man's-land between the British in their Charlestown defenses and the Americans encircling them. Skirmishes erupted in and around Dorchester when opposing patrols and raiding parties collided. The farms and plantations nearby that had supplied provisions for the British now furnished food for the Americans. The British evacuated Charlestown in December of 1782, bringing to a close the Revolution in South Carolina. Dorchester never recovered from the devastation of the war.

Col. Henry Lee raided the abandoned British post at Dorchester in the summer of 1781. When he returned to Dorchester at the end of the year with Nathanael Greene, Lee found that the countryside around the village had been scoured of food by both the British and American armies.

The Remains of a Considerable Town

"I passed Dorchester, where there are the remains of what appears to have once been a considerable town: there are the ruins of an elegant church, and the vestiges of several well-built houses." That is how Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury saw Dorchester on March 5, 1788. The village was not entirely abandoned. For a number of years it served as a polling place for state and national elections. The fort was used as a tile factory, its powder magazine converted into a kiln for firing clay roofing tiles. The old meeting house, left to decay since the departure of the Congregationalists for Georgia in the 1750s, was repaired in 1794 by a new group of Congregationalists living in the area. St. George's Church was finally repaired in 1811 by local Episcopalians.

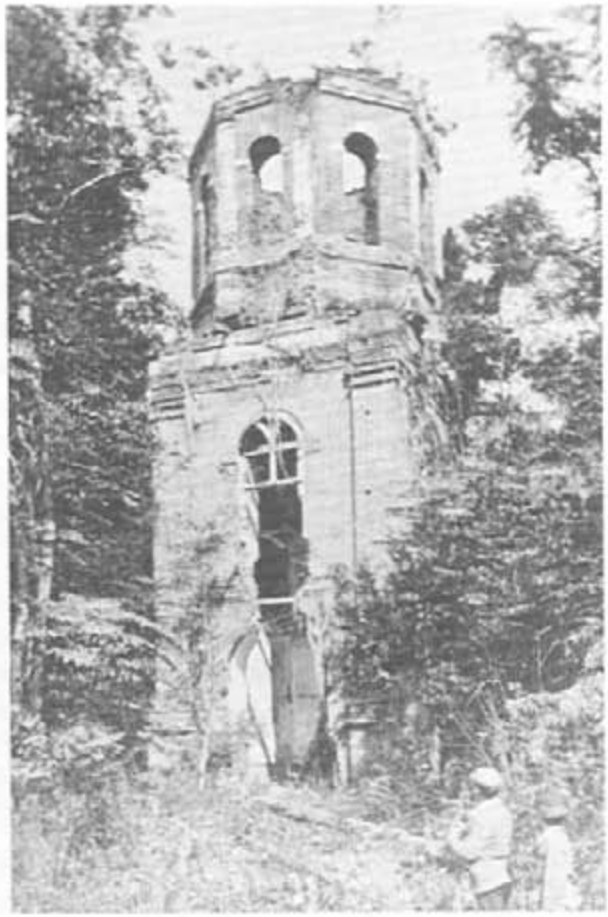
But little could be done to revive the village.



In the earliest known illustration of Dorchester, drawn in May 1835, St. George's Church rises above the overgrown site of the abandoned town.

Rice growing was now concentrated nearer the coast, where planters harnessed the rise and fall of the tides to irrigate and drain their fields. Rice planters along the upper Ashley, unable to adopt this new, more efficient method of cultivation--the river's water was too brackish and its banks too high--found themselves unable to compete. Most local planters abandoned their low-lying rice fields for higher lands where cotton could be grown.

Old, undrained rice fields full of rotting vegetation and stagnant water aggravated the unhealthiness of the upper Ashley. A few miles north of Dorchester, a well-drained area of high, sandy pine ridges offered local planters a refuge from the damp, malarial land near the river. They built summer homes in the region, and around those homes the town of Summerville developed. Summerville gradually became the successor to the village of Dorchester. The Dorchester Free School moved to Summerville in 1818. In 1855 Summerville's newly incorporated St. Paul's Episcopal Church acquired the land and other property of St. George's Church, abandoned since 1820. Finally, in 1882, the Congregational meeting house and its property came under control of the Summerville Presbyterian Church.



By the time the first photograph of St. George's Church was taken in the 1870s, fire and scavengers had left only the tower.

Bricks from Dorchester's buildings were taken for use in new construction in Summerville. The walls of St. George's Church were entirely gone by the mid-1800s, and the very foundation of the structure was dug out of the ground. Some believed that the abandoned church had been deliberately set on fire to ease the removal of bricks. The tower was spared, though, apparently because dismantling it posed too difficult and dangerous an undertaking for local scavengers.

A powerful earthquake on August 31, 1886, added to the destruction of Dorchester. The quake, centered only four and a half miles from the village site, split the church tower and hurled large chunks of brick and mortar in several directions from the top of the structure. Some pieces landed on the ground thirty-five feet from the tower's base. (One section of brick and mortar can still be seen embedded in the ground in front of the tower.) Even the massive tabby walls of the fort cracked in many places under the strain.

The earthquake of 1886 split the tower and toppled most of its octagonal cap.

The Rebirth of Dorchester

All of the land from the old village was completely contained in one plantation by 1851. Trees and brush covered much of the town site. Cotton and corn were grown in some areas, and the interior of the fort was once cleared for cultivation. "Even the land upon which the town stood is being removed," a visitor to Dorchester remarked in 1895. "A brick yard stands upon the site, and the soil is being dug away to obtain the clay beneath."

The ruins of Dorchester were favorite subjects for amateur artists. Adventurous sightseers and relic collectors combed over the site. The tower and fort became points of contention between antiquarians arguing over the history of the structures. Others were less concerned about the value of these relics. The remnants of the church served as a sanctuary for a slave shepherd and his flock during thunderstorms, and many visitors to the

A reminder of the Revolution, James Postell's gravestone drew some visitors to Dorchester. The large marble slab supposedly had been used as a butcher block by British soldiers who occupied the town.

Dorchester's tabby fort attracts a curious traveler in the early 1900s. "It had been a dream of many years, this seeing Dorchester," wrote a visitor to the site in 1895, "and I was amply repaid for all my dreaming and waiting."

old town immortalized themselves by scratching their names into the crumbling plaster of the tower.

A few people attempted to preserve the site and its ruins. Out of sentimental attachment to St. George's, several local families continued to bury their dead in the graveyard surrounding the church tower. Efforts to protect the cemetery culminated in the erection of a fence around the property in 1893 by Henry Augustus Middleton Smith, jurist and historian. In 1904 he purchased 600 acres of land that included the town site. Shortly afterward he published the first solidly researched account of Dorchester's history. Judge Smith was the last individual owner of the site. After his death, a timber company acquired the land. Fortunately, the National Society of Colonial Dames in South Carolina ensured that the site remained accessible to the public and occasionally cleared its ruins of overgrowth.

Public attention focused on Dorchester once again in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when Citadel history instructor Lawrence Lee began to identify building foundations on the old town site. Local newspapers followed Lee's work closely and helped generate interest in the acquisition of the property by the state. South Carolina leased a portion of the land from the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company in 1960 for preservation as a historic area. In 1969 the timber company donated the entire town site to South Carolina State Parks. The Episcopal Church deeded the graveyard and church tower. Soon after, the site of the village was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Three sets of steel straps, put in place through the efforts of the National Society of Colonial Dames, held the ruined tower together for about fifty years.

Citadel professor Lawrence Lee studies the Dorchester town plan from atop the walls of the fort. Dr. Lee's exploratory archaeology at Dorchester in the late 1950s and early 1960s prompted the state to acquire the site as a historic park.

The fort at Dorchester, almost completely intact after over 200 years, is the best preserved tabby fortification in the United States.

Low tide on the Ashley River reveals the remains of one of Dorchester's wharves. This wharf is just below lot 8.

Nineteenth-century scavengers removed bricks from the powder magazine for use in the construction of the Presbyterian parsonage in Summerville. The remnants of the magazine were uncovered by archaeologists in the summer of 1973.

Old Dorchester State Park

Today Old Dorchester State Park encompasses all of what was once the colonial town of Dorchester. Little is left of that town, though. Small posts mark the corners of the village lots. The tower of St. George's Church looms over a few gravestones in the nearby cemetery. The tabby fort still stands watch over the magazine on the bluff above the river; despite numerous large cracks and the absence of part of one bastion, it is the best-preserved tabby fortification in the United States. At low tide the remnants of two log wharves become visible to remind visitors of deerskins, rice, and merchandise brought into the village on schooners and periaguas.

Much more of Dorchester lies invisible under the surface of the ground. There the archaeological remains of the town's past are preserved in a virtual time capsule of colonial history, awaiting periodic investigation by archaeologists and historians. Old Dorchester State Park protects the town site and its remnants--both above and below the ground--and interprets them to tell the unfolding story of the Anglicans and dissenters, the rice planters and Indian traders, and the merchants, artisans, and slaves who once lived and worked in this village.

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Page 22: Illustration of church, 1835, from Francis C. Hill Sketchbook, A.R. Wentz Library, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

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Page 23: Illustration of church tower from Charles Edward Dutton, *The Charleston Earthquake of August 31, 1886* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1890)

Gravestone photo, South Carolina State Parks, SC PRT

Page 24: All courtesy of the South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina

Page 25: All South Carolina State Parks, SC PRT

For Additional Reading

For the reader interested in learning more about Dorchester and colonial South Carolina, the following works are recommended.

A good general account of Dorchester is still Henry A. M. Smith's pioneering article, "The Town of Dorchester, in South Carolina--A Sketch of Its History," South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine, 6 (1905). The article has been conveniently reprinted with corrections and editorial comments in Cities and Towns of Early South Carolina, Volume 2 of The Historical Writings of Henry A. M. Smith, 3 volumes (Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1988). The settlement of Dorchester and the surrounding countryside is traced in detail in Legare Walker's Dorchester County (N.p.: Privately printed typescript, 1941), which draws heavily on old deeds, laws, and the writings of Henry A. M. Smith.

A firsthand chronicle of the Congregationalists' migration to South Carolina written by church elder William Pratt appears in Narratives of Early Carolina, 1650-1708, edited by Alexander S. Salley (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911). The migration of the Congregationalists to Georgia can be followed in James Stacy's History and Published Records of the Midway Congregational Church (Newnan, GA.: S. W. Murray, 1894, 1903; reprint ed., 1951). Stacy's work also contains useful information on the Congregationalists' removal from Massachusetts.

Good introductions to colonial South Carolina history can be found in M. Eugene Sirmans' Colonial South Carolina: A Political History, 1663-1763 (Williamsburg, VA: Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1966) and Robert M. Weir's Colonial South Carolina: A History (Millwood, NY: KTO Press, 1983).

The work of the Anglican church and its ministers is presented in Charles S. Bolton's excellent study Southern Anglicanism: The Church of England in Colonial South Carolina, Contributions to the Study of Religion, Number 5 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982).

Slavery in the early colonial period is the subject of Peter H. Wood's superb Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1974). Daniel C. Littlefield examines the origins of South Carolina's African slaves and their possible contribution to rice cultivation in Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

A broad introduction to the colonial South Carolina economy is provided by Converse Clowse in Economic Beginnings in Colonial South Carolina, 1670-1730 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971). The Southern Frontier, 1670-1732, by Verner W. Crane (Durham: Duke University Press, 1928) focuses on South Carolina's Indian trade. Leila Sellers' Charleston Business on the Eve of the Revolution (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934) gives a good account of the Charleston mercantile community and its role in the commerce of such inland towns as Dorchester.

Two outstanding reports by Richard F. Carrillo offer historical and archaeological information on the fort at Dorchester: Preliminary Archaeological Investigations at Fort Dorchester (38DR4), Research Manuscript Series No. 39 (Columbia: Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of South Carolina, 1973) and Archaeological Investigations at Fort Dorchester (38DR4): An Architectural Assessment, Research Manuscript Series No. 86 (Columbia: Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of South Carolina, 1976).

The two volumes of Edward McCrady's History of South Carolina in the Revolution (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901-1902) still provide the most comprehensive coverage of the Revolutionary War in the state. Henry Lumpkin's From Savannah to Yorktown: The American Revolution in the South (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1981) is a more readable, modern account that deals exclusively with military events.

The consolidation of land from the old village and township lots after the Revolution is covered in Henry A. M. Smith's "The Upper Ashley and the Mutations of Families," South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine 20 (1919), reprinted in Rivers and Regions of Early South Carolina, Volume 3 of The Historical Writings of Henry A. M. Smith.

Old Dorchester State Park is northwest of Charleston on S.C. 642, and 4 miles south of Summerville via S.C. 165.

OLD DORCHESTER STATE PARK
300 State Park Road
Summerville, SC 29845
(803) 873-1740

Park Hours: Thursday - Monday 9 a.m. - 6 p.m.
Closed Tuesdays & Wednesdays
Office Hours: Thursday - Monday 11 a.m. - noon

ERRATUM

Joseph Griffen, mentioned on page 7, should be identified as a weaver, not as a shoemaker.