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### A Report from the SHA Meetings in Albuquerque: Exploring a More Global Perspective on Plantation Archaeology

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A Report from the SHA Meetings in Albuquerque:  
Exploring a More Global Perspective on Plantation Archaeology

By Chana Kraus-Friedberg and Kristen R. Fellows

When we first began discussing organizing a conference session on plantation archaeology, we were both struck by the paucity of work addressing the global nature of plantation structures. Most historical archaeologists have focused their research on enslaved plantation workers and their masters, primarily in the mainland United States. While we acknowledge the importance of such work, we are also interested in the ways that plantations worldwide differed by workforce, crops and location, and how all plantations were united under a global economic structure. The historical legacy and implications of the plantation system in terms of the modern realities of racial ideologies, the world economy and globalization to name a few, are of great social significance. In the session we organized at the 2008 Meetings of the Society for Historical Archaeology, we sought to bring together archaeologists who work on diverse plantation sites. We hoped that the session would spark further discussions on the connections, actual and ideological, between the various plantation sites under study.

The papers presented at the session covered a broad geographical range, representing sites in Barbados (Smith), the Yucatan (Sweitz), Virginia (Heath and Lee, Gary) and Hawai'i (Kraus-Friedberg, Six). The crops grown on these sites ranged from tobacco and wheat at Poplar Forest in Virginia to sugar in Barbados and Hawai'i. As the opening paper in the session (Fellows) outlined, however, many of the owners of these plantations would have read common plantation periodicals and used common methods to control their workers and process their crops. In future sessions, we hope to broaden the range of plantation sites represented in the papers even further. For the present, we are providing the session and paper abstracts, in the hopes that other archaeologists interested in plantation sites will join in the dialogue which began at the session.

*Symposium: Plantation Archaeology: Expanding Perspectives*

Chairs: Chana Kraus-Friedberg and Kristen R. Fellows

Plantation archaeology is one of the oldest and most enduring research threads in historical archaeology. From early excavations which focused on Big Houses and Big Men, to more recent explorations of African-American heritage, racism, and power, the topic has changed with the times and continues to provide grounds for important research. Throughout its history, however, plantation archaeology has tended to focus on the stereotypical cotton plantation "down South." This tendency has resulted in a paucity of archaeological research addressing the worldwide nature of the plantation system, the diversity of plantation locales and how they were affected by this larger system, and the impact which the plantation system had and continues to have in globalism and the global economy. This session will bring together researchers interested in a range of plantation-related issues, in order to begin a dialogue on the global and local contexts for individual plantations and the plantation system.

*Expanding Plantation Archaeology: An Introduction*

Kristen R. Fellows (University of Pennsylvania), [kfellows@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:kfellows@sas.upenn.edu)

While plantations have been the focus of archaeological study since as early as the 1930s, very little of the research has placed the particular plantation into a broader context. Recently this subfield has begun to shift away from the U.S. South and into regions such as the Caribbean, Mexico, and Hawai'i. This paper will serve as an introduction to the session. It will examine where plantation archaeology has traditionally been, more recent lines of research that have newly emerged, and it will raise questions for future research.

*It's a Fine, Fine Line: Connections between Enslaved and Free Laborers in the Plantation System*

Chana Kraus-Friedberg (University of Pennsylvania), [chanakf@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:chanakf@sas.upenn.edu)

Since its inception, plantation archaeology has followed a trend in popular history which considers the slave plantation as an archetype which shifted radically with the end of slavery. The relationship between enslaved and free labor on plantations, however, was closer to a continuum than to a radical disjuncture. Legal codes and mores which regulated contract labor on plantations by reacting to its similarity or difference to slavery ensured that the two states continued to be conceptually intertwined even after slavery had ended. This paper discusses the legal and socio-economic status of contract laborers on Hawai'i's sugar plantations, as a case study for the ways in which the slave regime continued to influence free plantation workers' lives.

*Hilea: When Public Archaeology Gets Personal*

Janet Six (University of Pennsylvania)

In Hawai'i's Russian Adventure: A New Look at Old History, archaeologist Peter Mills breaks down historian Fernand Braudel's "short-term events" into moments. According to Mills, "Moments are actively created and perceived by people in the process of interpreting their world." Beginning in the summer of 2004, -- through first hand experience -- I came to understand Mill's concept of "critical periods of time" when I unwittingly found myself actively creating a "moment." By focusing on plantation archaeology in Hawai'i I planned to steer clear of much of the controversy and stigma native Hawaiians regularly associate with archaeology. Contrary to my intention, recent finds cast archaeology center stage in an ongoing legal battle -- presently on the Hawai'i State Supreme Court docket -- over the boyhood home of Pai'ea Kamehameha (Kamehameha I).

*Altered State: How modified material culture illuminates the individual in plantation contexts*

Jack Gary (Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest)

The material culture recovered from numerous context associated with labor at a 17th century northeastern provisioning plantation and Thomas Jefferson's 19th century Poplar Forest plantation points towards the study of post-manufacture modifications as one of archaeology's entrées into the personal lives of individuals associated with plantation groups. Modified objects such as coins, tobacco pipes, and buttons provide information concerning the individual's retention of cultural practices, appropriation of dominant cultural symbology and materials, and the sense of self in the often

dehumanizing context of plantation labor systems. The individualized nature of many of these objects provides an effective bridge to connect public audiences with a past that can be uncomfortable.

*Beads, Eggshells, and Kitten Teeth: Comparative Analyses of Three Subfloor Pit Assemblages*

Barbara Heath (University of Tennessee) and Lori Lee

In this paper, the authors will compare artifact assemblages recovered from three 18th through mid-19th century subfloor pits from quarter sites excavated at Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest in Bedford County, Virginia. While our research will consider whole assemblages, the contents of flotation samples will form the focus of our discussion. We will summarize changing sampling strategies and recovery methods. We will also explore the intersection of formation processes and feature use, present analyses of unique artifact types, and summarize assemblage variation among small finds. These tiny artifacts are crucial evidence of household activities that are unrepresented or underrepresented in the larger samples. They further clarify the conditions under which site residents created, used, and abandoned these feature types over time.

*Sweetening the British Atlantic World: Plantation Archaeology in Barbados in Global Perspective*

Frederick H. Smith (College of William and Mary), fhsmit@wm.edu

In his seminal work *Capitalism and Slavery*, the renowned Caribbean historian Eric Williams attributed the rise of Britain's industrial revolution in large part to the economic success of sugarcane agriculture in the British Caribbean colonies. Archaeological investigations at seventeenth-century urban domestic and rural plantation sites in Barbados, Britain's first major sugar island in the Caribbean in the seventeenth century, highlight the need for an expansive global perspective in plantation archaeology. The evidence indicates that sugar plantations in Barbados, though efficient and in many ways self-contained operations, must be viewed within the larger framework of the island's economy. More importantly, slavery, capitalism, and colonialism provide prisms through which to view the sugar plantation complex in Barbados and its impact on the broader British Atlantic economy.

*Plantation System as Capitalist System: An Archaeological Case Study from Yucatan*

Sam R. Sweitz (Michigan Technological University), srsweitz@mtu.edu

Plantation systems are part of the larger global and historical market processes in which worldwide networks of people and products were formed. The economic and political networks created around international commodity markets served as conduits for broader cultural exchange. My archaeological investigations in Yucatan demonstrate how modes of production and social relations were inexorably altered with the introduction of the hacienda, a mode of production informed by and based on the expanding system of world capitalism. I contend that plantation systems should be viewed as capitalist systems. Only from a global perspective can we ultimately understand the significance of plantations.

We would like to thank everyone who attended the symposium; we were very fortunate to have an excellent and large audience. And finally, a very special thank you to the presenters and our discussant, Dr. Theresa Singleton. We both look forward to furthering the dialogue centered on the plantation complex in the future.

