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Wormsloe Land Use Research: Update #1

Despite my preliminary notion that the story of Wormsloe might be primarily one of gardening and cultivating exotic plants, research so far has unearthed much more information on the plantation's agricultural activities. I have a feeling that the story will change once I turn to the 20th century documents, as the finding aids record a great deal of information about Wormsloe gardens.

I have found relatively little new (unpublished) information regarding Wormsloe during the colonial period. Most of the relevant papers in the De Renne collection consist of land grants (which do little more than describe the bounds of the property), letters that contain little discussion of Wormsloe, and some scattered estate inventories that are somewhat useful. I have worked through a number of outside accounts of Wormsloe noted in Coulter, Bragg, and Kelso, (including passages from Bartram's journal, a Georgia Gazette article, and dispatches to a London magazine) which do describe some of the exotic and ornamental plants Noble Jones grew on the property, but to date I have not been able to assemble a more in-depth profile of the colonial plantation. The American Philosophical Association in Philadelphia holds fourteen letters between Benjamin Franklin and Noble W. Jones, but their manuscript summaries suggest the letters are about colonial politics, and seem to have little to nothing to do with Wormsloe.

The most revealing and in-depth documents to this point have come from the antebellum period. G.W. Jones attempted to revitalize Wormsloe as a money-making cotton plantation, and kept an account book and farm journal during this period recording his efforts to make the farm pay. Notes in the journal, a clippings notebook, and other documents scattered throughout the De Renne papers also reveal that Jones was widely read in and influenced by the broader southern agricultural reform movement of the 1840s and 1850s. Jones apparently put the advice of reformers like Edmund Ruffin of Virginia into practice at Wormsloe. During the 1850s, Jones raised Sea Island cotton on the plantation, but he also experimented with other money-making farm products, planting peanuts, selling butter and turkeys, and marketing the occasional cow or calf. Also following reformers' advice, Jones introduced improved and exotic breeds of stock and crops to Wormsloe, purchasing Newport, Aldency (?), and Devon cattle, Newport chickens, and trying Rhode Island Yellow Flint, Maryland White, and Wyandot corn. He also experimented with producing his own cane syrup from Chinese sugar cane (Molasses was one of the major expenses in Jones' slave provisioning). In perhaps his most naive nod to reformer advice, Jones even purchased thirty-three sheep and a pure-bred Merino ram in an attempt to sell wool, but abandoned the effort after only two seasons. Records also show that he applied superphosphate of lime and large amounts of guano onto Wormsloe's fields - the cutting edge of soil amendment in the mid-19th century.

Through the use of letters, the farm journal, and account books, I have started to build a database of crops, stock, and produce for Wormsloe. Obtaining accurate figures for cotton production on the plantation from the 1840s through the 1860s was fairly easy, but the records for other crops was much spottier. In many cases, the production of a certain crop (i.e. corn or sweet potatoes) was documented, but figures were not given. I have also unearthed some similar, though less comprehensive records for the 1830s, as well as 1865 to the early 1900s, with the best documented span being 1904-1906, when Wormsloe functioned as a dairy. Hopefully further time in the archives will do more to flesh out these stretches.

The De Renne, Barrow, and Jones papers also have some enticing hints at the relationship between Wormsloe's land and African Americans. Account books, receipts, letters, and journals tangentially describe everyday slave life on the plantation, and provide glimpses into the relationship between postwar Wormsloe, the De Renne family, and freedpeople's labor. Documentary evidence also reveals that Long Island (long a part of Wormsloe) fell under Special Field Order 15 and was temporarily divided among freedpeople, and that Wormsloe itself was leased for three years to the northern company Smillie and Teeple, who were intent on raising cotton on a free labor model. While I have found little more than scraps about this period, there is hope the archives will produce additional Reconstruction accounts. Following Reconstruction, African Americans often made the key management decisions on Wormsloe. Former slave Brutus Butler served as the plantation's manager for a number of years, and Jesse Beach directed the Wormsloe dairy's daily operations for W.J. De Renne in the early years of the 20th Century.

Manuscript Documents Examined

MS 1064: George Wymerley Jones De Renne Family Papers

Boxes: 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 22, 26, 29, 57, 58.

MS 1064 (a): De Renne Family Papers, Oversized

All

MS 1127: Noble Jones Family Papers

All

MS 1788: Wymerley Wormsloe De Renne Family Papers

Box 119

MS 2819: De Renne Family Papers

Boxes: 10, 13

1 October, 2008

Wormsloe Land Use Research: Update #2

This month has been spent in the archives much like the previous one. I have compiled more sources for the colonial period, continued to strengthen my understanding of Wormsloe during the 19th century, and have begun to look at the documents detailing Wormsloe during the early 1900s.

The Craig Barrow papers have provided some documents that will help flesh out a more in-depth picture of colonial Wormsloe. Sometime in the 1930s, Craig or Elfrida made a concerted effort to gather all existing scraps of information about the Joneses prior to the Revolution, transcribing and copying dispersed letters, newspaper accounts, wills, indentures, and colonial accounts. While these sources are not enough to provide an intimate understanding of 1700s Wormsloe, they do help solidify some details and allow me to speculate in a much more informed manner. Letters from and to James Habersham reveal that Jones was actively involved in silk production at Wormsloe, under the direction of his daughter Mary, and that the plantation provided at least part of the silkworm stock used throughout the colony. An observer also gives us a brief description of Jones' "pretty parcel" of mulberry trees. A description of the Isle of Hope and several newspaper advertisements outline some details of stock-raising on the property. Rather than being connected to the greater common range, Wormsloe was fenced in across the neck of the peninsula from an early date, and Mary Bulloch's (formerly Jones) estate inventory describes a small herd of cattle that roamed the property. As a fenced property, Wormsloe seems abnormal in the immediate Isle of Hope area. An 1802 map described the area north of Wormsloe and east of Savannah as a "cattle park".

Observations of Bartram and other visitors to Wormsloe, widely quoted in Coulter and others, show the experimental side of Jones' property. According to Bartram, Wormsloe's plants included oranges, nectarines, apricots, peaches, pomegranates, and grapes. Visitors traveled from Savannah to see a century plant (*Agave americana*) in bloom, and the famous 1772 letter from Benjamin Franklin to Noble W. Jones reveals that the Joneses' interest in experimental plants was widely known.

I have begun examining the agricultural census records for Chatham County from 1840 to 1900. Initially, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the efforts on Wormsloe mirrored some broader county trends and defied others. GW Jones tried to expand cotton production and stock raising at a period in which those forms of agriculture were on the way out in Chatham County, but his efforts to diversify and produce market garden goods was a reflection of similar efforts by his neighbors. While these agricultural summary figures are useful, it looks unlikely that I will be able to get access to the manuscript agricultural census returns. These returns itemized production for each farm, listing bales of cotton, bushels of corn, number of cows, improved acreage, etc., and could add to an understanding of the state of Wormsloe agriculture during periods after 1840 (when the agricultural census began) which lack strong journal or account book records. The University of Georgia does not have copies of these

records, and initial queries with state archives personnel have also turned up little. The national archives likely hold the only existing copies of the manuscript returns.

Thorough examination of the records and accounts for Wormsloe from the mid 1850's to 1880 (when such records are available for every year) speak powerfully to the difficulty of modernizing and improving plantation agriculture. From 1854, when GW Jones took over daily operation of the property, to the end of the war in 1865, Wormsloe turned a profit only once: making \$1,112.45 in 1859. From 1866 to 1880, Jones/De Renne¹ rented the property out every year but one, first to the northern company Smillie and Teeple, and then to freedmen who cultivated small plots of cotton, cowpeas, and sweet potatoes for nominal fees. Every rental year De Renne turned some profit. When he tried producing cotton himself again in 1870 on a portion of the property, he lost \$1,740. While these figures perhaps reflect both difficulties in management and the luxury of farming while drawing income from other sources, they also speak to the inherent difficulties of trying new types of agriculture and experimenting in the plantation South.

This month's research has also turned up a few good sources for understanding what Wormsloe was like during the early 1900s. An extensive photograph collection from around 1900 gives a glimpse into the grounds, forest, and foliage on the property, and in many cases can be compared directly to stereograph photos taken in the 1870s. Initial comparisons reveal that the plantation was probably most open around the middle of the 19th century and has slowly reforested since that time. A pair of rough maps drawn around the height of ornamental garden planting show where each species was planted, and may help researchers determine what species were intentionally introduced and which have spread on their own. Another promising document is a bird list from the 1920s (and possibly earlier) in the handwriting of WW De Renne. The list includes 165 birds and 15 mammals observed on Wormsloe.

Manuscript Documents Examined

MS 1064: George Wymberley Jones De Renne Family Papers

Boxes: 15, 18, 20, 30

MS 1120: De Renne Family Receipts and Remedies

One volume - entire

MS 1788: Wymberley Wormsloe De Renne Family Papers

Boxes: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 66,

MS 2819: De Renne Family Papers

Boxes: 3, 7, 8, 19, 24

MS 3090: Craig Barrow Family Papers

Boxes: 1, 5, 17, 19

¹ GW Jones legally changed his surname to De Renne in 1866.

1 November, 2008

Wormsloe Land Use Research: Update #3

I have split my time this month between the manuscript collections in Hargrett and doing some research in secondary sources to provide context for the archival data I have been collecting. I have been trying to read as much as possible on sea island cotton culture and Chatham County's agriculture to help me understand how and why certain changes occurred at Wormsloe. I also had the pleasure this month of participating with Paul Sutter, Tommy Jordan, and Christian Lopez in recording a podcast for the Wormsloe Institute. I have located some additional small manuscript collections at the Georgia Historical Society that may shed further light on Wormsloe's history. While the society holds some letters and accounts of the Jones family, of special interest is a set of papers regarding the Wimberly tract, which has made up the northern portion of Wormsloe at various points throughout the plantation's history. I plan to examine these manuscripts following the November scientific advisory council meeting in Savannah.

A little bit of outside exploration reveals that Wormsloe was probably among the first generation of plantations in the United States to produce sea island cotton. While there is still some debate over exactly when commercial production of sea island cotton first took place (most historians acknowledge that it was probably raised in very small quantities for home use from the very first years of the Trustee's garden), the most common answer seems to be 1786 on Skidaway Island adjacent to Wormsloe. This day-neutral cotton variety most likely came to Georgia from Anguilla, via planters in the Bahamas. Records indicate that Wormsloe may have produced sea island cotton by as early as the end of the eighteenth century, but I will need to go back through some of the older document sets to see if I can establish a more concrete date. In broad strokes, sea island cultivation on Wormsloe seems to mirror the plant's history in the lowcountry, emerging after the Revolution, peaking just prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, and quickly withering following the war due to an inability to organize (or coerce) labor.

As I have worked my way through some of the documents for Wormsloe in the early decades of the twentieth century, I have been struck with the similarities between Augusta De Renne's plans for the Wormsloe gardens as a privately-owned tourist attraction, and similar ventures that were emerging or growing in the South at the same time. Wormsloe advertising touting the plantation as a combination of the "natural" and the beauty of human cultivation was far from unique. For just a few examples, Middleton Plantation and Magnolia Gardens in South Carolina's lowcountry both attracted similar customers during the 1930s as Wormsloe, with Middleton opening to the public around this time and Magnolia expanding. Other private southern attractions also boomed during this era, with the growth of automobile ownership and an increasing interest in outdoor recreation. While, lacking the historic plantation house and agricultural history, Chimney Rock and Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina, and Luray Caverns in Virginia also grew dramatically during the 1930s as the De Renns sought to make Wormsloe a regional attraction. Wormsloe also seems to fit these

patterns in its combination of tourist activities and more commercial operations. Like many of the aforementioned sites, the De Renne's drew money from their property via sources other than just visitors (primarily through rental agreements with the Foremost Dairy Company).

In a follow-up to one of the documents I commented on in last month's research update, the bird list that I had attributed to W. W. DeRenne is an even more promising source in light of some other documents I have worked through. Based on a number of old newspaper articles and a photograph, the list seems to be an inventory of taxidermy mounts once on display as part of a small museum at Wormsloe rather than an observation or "life" list. These sources also point to W. J. De Renne rather than W. W. De Renne as the avian collector, pushing back the date for the list, and describe the collection as composed entirely of local species. With this new information, what was once a promising bird list that likely included species seen on Wormsloe in the 1920s, now appears to be a fairly comprehensive inventory of the plantation's avifauna at the turn of the last century.

Also of potential interest, I have discovered a set of six photographs of Wormsloe from the 1934 Historic American Buildings Survey (a depression-era National Park Service program). I have not seen any of these pictures in the De Renne, Jones, or Barrow papers. There are two photos of the old fort ruins, one of the slave cabin exterior, one of the slave cabin interior, one of the old well, and most interestingly, one of a large structure referred to as a rice mill. Images of these photographs are available online through the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division ([http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=pphphoto&fileName=ga/ga0000/ga0003/photos/browse.db&action=browse&recNum=0&title2=Wormsloe,%20Isle%20of%20Hope,%20Savannah%20Vicinity,%20Savannah%20vicinity,%20Chatham%20County,%20GA&displayType=1&itemLink=r?pp/hh:@FIELD\(DOCID+@BAND\(@lit\(GA0003\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=pphphoto&fileName=ga/ga0000/ga0003/photos/browse.db&action=browse&recNum=0&title2=Wormsloe,%20Isle%20of%20Hope,%20Savannah%20Vicinity,%20Savannah%20vicinity,%20Chatham%20County,%20GA&displayType=1&itemLink=r?pp/hh:@FIELD(DOCID+@BAND(@lit(GA0003)))) [My apologies for the exceptionally long link]

Manuscript Documents Examined

MS 1064: George Wymberley Jones De Renne Family Papers

Boxes: 16, 31, 39, 50

MS 1788: Wymberley Wormsloe De Renne Family Papers

Boxes: 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 70, 79, 118

MS 2819: De Renne Family Papers

Boxes: 25, 26, 29, 30, 31, 36, 36A, 46, 47, oversize drawer

MS 3090: Craig Barrow Family Papers

Boxes: 9, 21, 23, 25, 26, 30

A Note on Documentation

A recent conversation with Dr. Sutter reminded me that I have not been explicit about how I have been collecting information for this project, and I will take the opportunity now to lay out that information in this report. For all research in the DeRenne and Barrow manuscript collection held at the Hargrett Library, I have kept both written and digital notes for relevant boxes and folders. The written notes are my rough/initial recordings of my findings, along with sketches taken from maps and/or photographs, queries about relationships between documents, etc. I then convert these

written notes into a slightly more coherent and polished electronic document, and back that document up frequently. The electronic document is laid out in the manner of an archival finding aid, with notes on boxes and files in order for each collection. This document, along with collected notes from secondary sources and other, outside, primary sources, will form the rough framework on which I will construct an extended essay/document on the plantation's land use history. My hope is that at the end of my fellowship, this aid might be useful for other researchers interested in Wormsloe's environmental history, or for scholars interested in obtaining evidence about some specific question regarding history of the southern environment or the region's agriculture.

1 December, 2008

Wormsloe Land Use Research: Update #4

I am still working in the Hargrett archives, looking at some of the remaining De Renne, Jones, and Barrow documents, and searching through some tangentially related collections that may shed further light on the Wormsloe landscape. I have also done some work with GIS and Jessica this month, compiling a list of construction dates for plantation structures from my notes. Jessica requested the list in the hopes it might help identify some of the artifacts she is uncovering. Jessica, Tommy, and I have also agreed to begin meeting biweekly, in order to help us coordinate our work more closely. This month I have also started drafting the colonial chapter of the land use history. While there are doubtlessly revisions and additions to come based on what I am unable to unearth at the Georgia Historical Society, it is exciting to begin telling Wormsloe's story.

A couple of non-De Renne collections in Hargrett are proving useful in understanding Wormsloe's environment. Naturalist John Abbot recorded descriptions of coastal Georgia in the late 1700s and early 1800s that serve as comparisons for later accounts. Of special interest is one of Abbot's birding notebooks, which describes coastal species nearly one hundred years prior to the W.J. De Renne list discussed in last month's report. While most species carry over from one period to the other, there are some obvious examples of the impact of human actions in the region, including the disappearance of passenger pigeons, Carolina parakeets, and ivory billed woodpeckers. I have also started the process of working with the Hubert Owens papers. Craig and Dianna Barrow informed me that Owens was a professor in the University of Georgia environmental planning and design school who routinely brought students to Wormsloe in the 1950s to study the ornamental gardens. Hargrett has moved the Owens papers to the repository, and I am working with the collections staff to isolate correspondence and notes relating to Wormsloe.

Though not typical sources used by environmental historians, Wormsloe's various recipe books and collections have proved particularly interesting documents for my purposes. The Lowcountry is famous for its distinctive cuisine, based largely on local ingredients, and the Wormsloe recipes from the 19th century reflect a use of local ingredients as well as a fusion of African and European flavors and techniques. Some recipes used traditional slave starches to make cassava cakes, arrowroot griddlecakes, arrowroot custard, or arrowroot pudding. The description of many other dishes serve as both simple field guides and evidence of the importance of local seafood and game in the diet of Wormsloe's residents. Some of the recipes that illustrate the relationship between the marshes, forests, and local people include: soft-shell turtle soup, stewed turtle fins, rock fish, stewed black drum, roasted canvas back ducks, boiled palmetto, baked crabs, frozen rice pudding, rice croquettes with chicken and oysters, deviled crabs, gumbo, baked shad, and crab omelets. The same close relationship between people and the land is evident in another type of common recipe in the Hargrett records: medical remedies. The Joneses and De Rennes carefully recorded ways to treat

common Lowcountry maladies, describing “cures” for mosquito chills, fever, and diarrhea, among others.

The records describing usage of the Wormsloe commons in the late 1800s and early twentieth century have also proved very interesting. The De Rennes leased out fishing and oyster harvesting rights to former overseer Edward Nelson and his relatives. This controlled access to the marsh resources did not prevent other local people from taking fish and game from Wormsloe’s waters, and W.J. De Renne expressed continuing frustration at his inability to protect Wormsloe’s boundaries from poaching of all types. These struggles play out in letters, notebooks, contracts, and court records. He brought suit against repeat offenders, but the defendants usually avoided conviction, or payed only small fines even if found guilty. W.J. De Renne also connected his patrolling of Wormsloe to larger regional struggles over defining the lines between private property and common land. As an attempt to pass a Chatham County stock fence law took place in 1895, De Renne followed the debates carefully, pasting newspaper discussions of the proposed legislation into a scrapbook. When the new fence law passed on July 5, Wormsloe’s days as part of the common range had ended, and De Renne noted his approval.

During December I will continue to work in Hargrett, and hope to begin posting some of the more interesting and obscure maps, photographs, and drawings from the De Renne collection on the Wormsloe Institute’s library site. I also plan to continue working on the colonial chapter draft, and begin outlining the early republic period at Wormsloe.

Manuscript Documents Examined

MS 1064: George Wymberley Jones De Renne Family Papers

Boxes: 32, 36

MS 1127: Noble Jones Family Papers

Entire - examined again in light of intervening research

MS 1136: De Renne Historical Manuscripts

Entire: one box and one oversize drawer

MS 1654: John Abbot’s Notebook

Entire: one journal

MS 1788: Wymberley Wormsloe De Renne Family Papers

Boxes: 39, 40, 107, 112, 113, 118 (again)

MS 2819: De Renne Family Papers

Boxes: 20, 33, 34, 35

MS 3090: Craig Barrow Family Papers

Boxes: 41, 42

4 January, 2009

Wormsloe Land Use Research: Update #5

I have come close to wrapping up my first survey of the applicable materials in the Hargrett collection this month. The only major remaining material left is a portion of the Hubert Owens Papers, which may or may not prove fruitful. While I will certainly need to reexamine portions of the collection over the next few months, I now have a good grasp on exactly what the Georgia library holds. The next stage of the project, one I have already begun, is arranging these sources to tell the story of Wormsloe land use in a way that makes sense. In next month's research update I intend to submit a draft of the colonial portion of the paper. This month also saw more conversation and interdisciplinary work between myself, Jessica, and Tommy, a trend I believe will make for a stronger project over the course of the next few months.

One of the more fascinating trends emerging from the De Renne documents is the complexity and diversity of Wormsloe's agriculture throughout the property's history. The old stereotype of large southern plantations claims that planters grew a staple crop (be it cotton, tobacco, sugar, etc.), corn, maybe a few sweet potatoes and field peas, free-ranged hogs, and did little else. In comparison to northern or midwestern farms, southern plantations were considered simplistic, exploitative, and profit-driven. While this picture may be accurate for portions of the South, it was far from true for most of Wormsloe's history. Pouring through the manuscript records reveals a stunning range of field crops grown over the history and expanse of the property, including but not limited to: Sea Island Cotton, Irish potatoes, Chinese sugar cane, mulberry trees (for silk worms), sweet potatoes, corn, rye, oats, hay, velvet beans, field peas, cassava, green peas, cabbage, pumpkins, various kinds of fodder, and peanuts. The plantation also included a substantial garden with a wide variety of plants, ranging from beets and carrots to figs and watermelons.

The plantation's livestock covered an equally broad range. Domestic animals living on Wormsloe at various times included: Aldency, Devon, Newport and mixed-breed cattle, Merino sheep, goats, hogs, bronze turkeys, chickens, mules, horses, ponies, fantail and tumbling doves, dogs, cats, guineas, and peacocks. Adding to this astonishing diversity, the plantation's crops, garden, and stock were almost continually surrounded by ornamental and exotic plants, from the oranges and pomegranates of Noble Jones to the ornamental gardens first built by George W. Jones and enlarged by Augusta De Renne. Wormsloe is a tremendous example of the crop and livestock diversity on a particular southern plantation - whether Wormsloe is representative of large lowcountry plantations remains to be seen.

On December 10th, Tommy, Jessica, and I met for the first of our (roughly) biweekly meetings. We discussed ways we can work more closely across disciplines, what Hargrett resources might prove most useful for constructing GIS maps, and attempted to answer any tricky questions that emerged. Tommy and Jessica both expressed a desire for a more thorough timeline of Wormsloe than the one located on the state historic site webpage. I have spent some time this month putting together a more expansive timeline focused on periods of land use, property ownership, and

building dates. Our hope is that this will provide a handy reference and more context for all of our work.

Based on consultation with Tommy and Jessica, I have also located and requested the digitization of a number of maps and pictures by the Hargrett staff over the past month. These images should appear on the library-hosted Wormsloe webpage soon (none had posted yet as I write this). Some of the more interesting that have not appeared in previous publications include several new images of the plantation slave cabins, two photos revealing the location of the old rice mill in relation to the quarter's field and the slave cabins, a set of annotated plans for the 1920s ornamental gardens, a USDA farm blueprint showing field outlines and acreage, two hand drawn maps of crop plantings (probably 1914), a map of the marshes and a proposed causeway between Wormsloe and Long Island (1871), and the original 1829 construction plan for the plantation house. Our hope is that these images will help with both GIS mapping and the onsite archeological work, providing information and context for particular research questions. I plan to continue selecting maps and photographs for digitization over the upcoming months.

Manuscript Documents Examined

MS 1064 (a): De Renne Family Papers, Oversized

All

MS 1788: Wymberley Wormsloe De Renne Family Papers

Box 119

MS 2819: De Renne Family Papers

Boxes: 10, 24, 25, 36, Oversize drawer

MS 3090: Craig Barrow Family Papers

Boxes: 43, 46

Accession digital and print indexes for Hubert Owens Papers

Structures on Wormsloe in 1815 (aside from the fort/house)

1 - Cotton House. This was a storage facility and not a gin, in all likelihood. George Jones owned a plantation on Skidaway at the time, and recorded taking his cotton there to be ginned.

2 - Corn House.

3 - Pea House.

4 - Fodder House.

Structures 1-4 were all listed as wooden buildings.

-An 1815 tax list also lists "several negro huts" on the property. Jones owned 69 slaves kept in Chatham County at the time, but they were split between Wormsloe, Poplar Grove, Skidaway, and Savannah.

-My guess is that most, if not all, of these structures would have been located near the fort ruins, but there is always a shot they may have been near the dig site.