

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
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PLUM ORCHARD HISTORIC DISTRICT

Description:

Seventeen structures, a small cemetery, ruins of an antebellum home, and two archeological sites make up this district. The National Park Service has control of only a few structures and the archeological sites while the remainder are part of reserve life estates.

The Plum Orchard mansion (HS-1) is the major structure in the district. Built in Neoclassical Revival Style, it was designed in 1898 by the well-known Boston firm of Peabody and Stearns. In 1906, the same firm designed an extension to the mansion. The mansion's condition is basically good and the NPS has begun preservation work.

The mansion, built of brick and stucco with wood joists and some steel framing, features a two-story porch on a central pavilion supported by four Ionic columns with a monumental pediment. In the center of the pediment is a circular window divided into two sections. The central front of the mansion contains semi-circular arched full windows extending nearly to the floor. There are three such windows on each side of the main doorway. The main door also has a semi-circular arched transom. The second floor windows are rectangular with six-over-six sash.

Two side wings with porches extend from the central portion of the mansion. There is also an end porch on the west side of the building. The house is irregularly shaped because one wing was extended to incorporate the swimming pool in 1906. The roof is tile and a modified cross-gable style. The mansion contains 30 principal rooms (including thirteen bedrooms), 12 bathrooms, and numerous smaller service rooms. The mansion is entered through a great hall with dark wood panelling, a coffered ceiling, and a large fireplace nook. The main stair winds above the fireplace behind a large cornice supported by two Ionic columns. The library, with 10' bookcases, and dining room flank the great hall. A long gallery extends west from the library to the drawing room containing a marble faced fireplace, oak panelling, and beam ceiling. The wing extending to the rear contains the kitchen, pantry, servants' dining room, and breakfast room. In the east addition, leading off the piazza are the pool, squash court, and dressing rooms. A corridor runs from the second floor landing, with bedrooms and servants' rooms leading from it. The principal rooms of the house are the most elaborate, featuring parquet floors, moldings, columns and

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pilasters, wood panelling and wainscot, and sliding doors. The upper floor bedrooms are more simply detailed, with moldings, wallpaper, and some containing fireplaces.

In addition to the mansion, the Plum Orchard complex consisted of a carriage house, also attributed to Peabody and Stearns, the electrician's and caretaker's houses, dormitories for employees, a laundry, stables, cow barn, chicken houses, greenhouses, water tower, and a variety of smaller support structures. Most of these structures were of frame construction and were built at the time the mansion was constructed. Some are now in a dilapidated condition, others have collapsed, and several are now only foundations.

The remaining outbuildings all contribute to the significance of the historic district. The following is a description of the Plum Orchard outbuildings. Direct control is indicated by NPS (National Park Service) or RLE (Reserve Life Estate).

1. Carriage House (HS-3). This 1½ story frame building has a south wing twice as long as the north and a crossgabled roof with cedar shingles. The building is extremely deteriorated. The carriage house was built in the 1890s and was the first structure erected at Plum Orchard. It was used to house the workmen employed in building the main house and other structures. Historically it housed carriages and later automobiles, with the attendant tack and workshops. Rooms on the second floor were used by employees. (NPS)

2. Powerhouse (HS-6). This one-story stucco building features a hip roof with louvered cupola. The windows are 6/6 sash with a 6-light transom, and the front and rear doors have 12-light glazing. The building was constructed about 1900 to serve as the powerhouse for the estate complex and is in good condition. (RLE)

3. Watertower (HS-7). The tower was removed as a safety hazard about 1976. Its foundations remain in front of the electrician's house and the powerhouse.

4. Laundry Building Foundation (HS-8). This concrete foundation and front steps are part of a Reserve Life Estate (RLE).

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5. Duplex (S-9). A frame two-story house with stucco or plaster exterior. The roof is gabled with an interior chimney on the east and an exterior end chimney on the west. In fair condition, this structure is part of the reserve life estate of Mr. Thomas Johnston. In 1975 it was extensively altered, including the removal of some interior fixtures. These renovations have changed the historic appearance of the structure. (RLE).
6. Pumphouse (HS-10). An octagon structure with stucco walls and an octagonal roof. (NPS).
7. Caretaker's house (HS-11). A two-story residence with gable roof and chimneys. Most of the windows are six-over-six panes. There is a two-story inset porch at the rear of the building. The structure underwent extensive interior renovations in 1975-76 and exterior alterations including addition of a new front porch and removal of the second floor porch railing. These alterations may have affected the historic integrity of the building. (RLE).
8. Chicken house (HS-12). Consists of a long low frame and stucco building with gable roof containing a center and end gables. The structure is about 100 by 40 feet. it is in poor to fair condition. (RLE).
9. Two Greenhouses (HS-13-14). Two frame buildings in a very deteriorated condition with much of the glass gone (RLE).
10. Boathouse (HS-15). A frame structure with hip roof. Siding is of flush board. A large entrance door faces east. There are no window openings. (NPS).
11. Octagon shed (HS-16). A unique stucco building with an octagonal roof supporting a cupola (NPS).
12. Ruins of housekeeper's cottage (HS-5). Consists of brick and concrete foundations and a brick chimney. The structure burned in the 1960s.
13. Electrician's house (HS-2). This structure, which has a stucco exterior, is two-story with a small front portico one-story high. There is an inset porch on the east side and two chimneys on the gable roof. It is part of a Reserve Life Estate held by Nancy Butler. It is in good condition. Historically, it was the home of the electrician. (RLE).
14. Stables (HS-4). This is a frame structure with cross-gable roof. It is a single 1 story with a two-story center section. The building has

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undergone recent rehabilitation and had a number of former uses, serving as a plumbing shop, woodshop, stable and hayloft, wagon storage, and milking parlor for the Carnegie estate (RLE).

15. Existing dock (HS-18). Dock used by the National Park Service and others landing at Plum Orchard. Age of dock not known but less than fifty years old. (NPS).

16. Ruins of boathouse dock (HS-17). All that remains are the pilings that supported the dock. (NPS).

Archaeological sites:

The ruins known as the Deptford Tabby House, due to the large quantity of Deptford ceramics within the tabby matrix, appear to be the foundations of a wooden building. The tabby is covered in several places with a fine plaster and suggests that the ground level was intended for work space with living quarters on the second floor. These ruins are approximately 40 feet square. The structure is designated HS 20 and NPS 9 CAM 44, and is now heavily overgrown.

The building could have been in use as early as 1800, however, archeological evidence does not firmly support this. Three test excavations were conducted here and revealed that the structure is built on an aboriginal shell midden. The majority of artifacts recovered were prehistoric Indian ceramics associated with the Deptford occupation of the island. Historical artifacts were found in association with the aboriginal material, making any stratigraphic interpretation impossible.

Little historical material was recovered in these tests, hardly a representative sample. A large quantity of hand-forged iron nails were found as well as some copper brads. A small amount of unidentifiable bone and glass fragments were found. The most diagnostic material was the small amount of ceramics, the majority of which exhibited a blue feather edge or transfer pattern. Dates have not been accurately assigned but it is most likely that they will fall between 1830 and 1855.

The Peter Bernardy grave (HS-19) dates to the 1820s, when Peter Bernardy owned much of Plum Orchard, and consists of a small 8^{ft} by 12^{ft} foot area enclosed by a brick wall about 2 feet high. The bricks are made of tabby and clay. Some of the bricks have fallen away at one corner, but the wall is largely intact. The grave is located on the Johnson Reserve Life Estate near the stables.

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The archaeological site, NPS 9 CAM 17, [redacted]

[redacted]. The site occurs on Lakeland and Leon soils. A variety of vegetation covers the site ranging from grass to mixed oak, hardwood, palmetto, and pine. The majority of the site has been drastically modified by earlier construction and landscaping.

[redacted]. There are numerous shell mounds, some of which are slowly eroding into the marsh. Pottery collected ranges from Deptford to San Marcos.

There is a low sand mound located at Plum Orchard which has been virtually destroyed by treasure seekers. It is approximately 1.2 meters high and 20 meters in diameter. Current information suggests that this mound of aboriginal origin (several sherds of St. Catherine's ware have been recovered) was used in a 19th century mass burial of slaves who died of yellow fever.

A badly disturbed midden area is represented by 9 CAM 18. It is most likely a portion of the large Plum Orchard site. Unfortunately, construction and landscaping have obliterated all evidence of a contact between them. This midden 457m x 150m is over 60 centimeters thick in some areas. It lies on Lakeland soils and is covered by a dense growth of oak and scrub bushes. The majority of the ceramic material can be assigned to the Deptford Period. A few fragments of Savannah ware were also located.

Significance

The Plum Orchard complex is named for one of the 19th century plantations found [redacted]. The Bernardy family, about whom little is known, owned property during the ante-bellum years on the site of the present Plum Orchard estate. Their graves and the ruins of what was presumably the Bernardy house [redacted].

The Plum Orchard Historic District is significant in the areas of archeology and architecture.

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Archeology (Prehistoric and Historical)

The archaeological sites (NPS 9 CAM 17 and 18) have the potential to yield considerable data concerning the major questions raised in the general MRA significance statement. Additional historical research would seem to have the most potential for yielding an identification and date for the tabby house remains. It is most likely an important building dealing with the plantation era of the island and if so, represents one of the few tangible remnants of the period visible today [REDACTED]. The presence of the Bernardy graves would indicate that the tabby ruins are associated with these 19th century plantation owners and may yield information about the family and their lifestyle.

Architecture

Built at the request of Mrs. Lucy Carnegie for her son, George Lauder Carnegie, the Plum Orchard mansion is architecturally the most significant building [REDACTED]. Built in 1898, with the last addition completed about 1907, the mansion was designed by the prominent Boston firm of Peabody and Stearns, who were responsible for the enlargement of the Dungeness mansion. Approached over sweeping lawns, through a grove of live oaks, the mansion's imposing design and proportions, numerous rooms, recreational facilities, and elegant furnishings exemplify the lifestyle enjoyed by the Carnegies during the period of their residence on the island. The interior is equally as impressive as the exterior, with its dark wood panelling and woodwork, great hall and stair, numerous fireplaces, and wallpapered rooms.

Several of the outbuildings are architecturally interesting, such as the two octagonal structures, the classically designed electrician's house, and the carriagehouse, which was also designed by Peabody and Stearns and housed the workmen who built the mansion.

The tabby house ruins are the only substantial vestiges of any of the plantation houses found on Cumberland Island.

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the Plum Orchard Historic District starts from an [REDACTED]