Resource #1. Description of Rice Cultivation in Georgetown, South Carolina

Georgetown was an example of a coastal South Carolina area similar to those close to Charleston.

“During the summer months, rice crops waved over fields of thousands of acres in extent, and upon a surface so level and unbroken, that in casting one's eye up and down the river, there was not for miles, an intervening object to obstruct the sight.”

The rice fields were carved out of tidal swamps along coastal rivers by the enslaved people brought to South Carolina from the West Indies and West Africa. With primitive tools, these people cleared the low-lying land of huge cypress and gum trees, and built canals, dikes, and trunks (small floodgates) that allowed the flooding and draining of fields with the high and low tides. From the 18th century to the Civil War, enslaved people planted, tended, and harvested the crops that made plantation owners wealthy and Georgetown County, South Carolina, the second largest rice producer in the world.

The intricate steps involved in planting, cultivating, harvesting, and preparing rice required an immense labor force. Planters stated that Africans enslaved were particularly suited to provide that labor force for two reasons: 1) rice was grown in some areas of Africa and there was evidence that some slaves were familiar with the methods of cultivation practiced there, and 2) it was thought that the slaves, by virtue of their racial characteristics, were better able than white laborers to withstand the extreme heat and humidity of the tidal swamps and therefore would be more productive workers. The detailed and extensive rice cultivating systems increased demand for slave imports in South Carolina, doubling the enslaved population between 1750 and 1770. They faced long days of backbreaking work and difficult tasks. Daily work on an antebellum rice plantation was divided into tasks. Each field hand was given a task — usually nine or ten hours' hard work — or a fraction of a task to complete each day according to his or her ability. The tasks were assigned by the driver, an enslaved man appointed to supervise the daily work of the field hands.

(G.S.S., "Sketches of the Santee River," *The American Monthly Magazine* [October 1836].) This text is taken from: *http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/3rice/3rice.htm* and *http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/3rice/3facts1.htm*.