



The Enslaved Communities on Fort George Island



*A Special History Study for
Timucuan Ecological & Historic Preserve*

Amani T. Marshall, Ph.D.

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By Amani T. Marshall, Ph.D.

Presented to Timucuan Ecological & Historic Preserve,
Interior Region 2 (Legacy Southeast Region)

Prepared under a cooperative agreement between
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Sharecropping family on Fort George Island, 1875, The New York Public Library.
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This study is dedicated to the enslaved men, women, and children who lived and labored on Fort George Island.

Introduction

The National Park Service manages Kingsley Plantation, a fifty-one-acre property on Fort George Island, 23 miles northeast of Jacksonville, Florida. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1970, Kingsley Plantation is the oldest surviving antebellum Spanish Colonial plantation in the United States. Significant scholarly attention has focused on Zephaniah Kingsley, whose 1828 treatise on slavery gained national attention, and his wife; Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley was born into a noble Wolof family in Senegal, sold into slavery in the Americas, and eventually married her enslaver, gained her freedom, and became a prominent enslaver and central figure in Florida's free Black community.¹ Less attention has been paid to the hundreds of enslaved people who lived and labored on Fort George Island, before and after the Kingsley's tenure. This Special History Study will fill the gap in the National Park Service's efforts to interpret the site and tell the stories of these enslaved individuals.

The study covers the period from the late eighteenth century through the late nineteenth century, during which time the property changed hands several times:

- John McQueen (1791–1804)
- John McIntosh (1804–1817)
- Zephaniah and Anna Kingsley (rented 1814–1817; owned 1817–1839)
- Kingsley Beatty Gibbs and Ralph King (1839–1842)
- Kingsley Beatty Gibbs (1842–1853)
- John Lewis (1853–1854)
- Charles A. Thompson (1854–1860)
- Charles H. and Charlotte Barnwell (1860–1866)
- George W. Beach and Abner C. Keeney (1866–1869)
- John Rollins (1869–1906)

Chapter one, “Origins, Identities and Communities,” explores the origins of the enslaved communities who arrived at Fort George Island from port cities around the Black Atlantic world. Some had liberated themselves in Charleston during the American Revolution, only to be re-enslaved and relocated to Fort George. Others survived warfare and capture in East, Central, and West Africa, and the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade, before being sold to East Florida enslavers.

¹ See Daniel W. Stowell, *Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve Historic Resource Study* (Atlanta: National Park Service Southeast Field Area, 1996), 33–4; Daniel Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley and the Atlantic World: Slave Trader, Plantation Owner, Emancipator* (University of Florida Press, 2013); Daniel L. Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley: African Princess, Florida Slave, Plantation Slaveowner*, Revised and Expanded Edition (University Press of Florida, 2018).

Chapter two, “Life and Labor,” details the working lives of the enslaved men, women, and children who crafted buildings and ships, cut timber, dug canals, and navigated boats, in addition to raising cash crops. While Kingsley argued that the opportunity to keep the full profits of their garden plots eliminated the need for harsh discipline, the evidence reveals that enslavers combined these inducements with threats of violence to keep them laboring under conditions that threatened their physical and mental health.

Chapter three, “Community and Culture,” details how the enslaved Africans who labored for Zephaniah Kingsley came together to form a new African-descended community in Spanish Florida. Together they combined religions from their diverse homelands with Christian tenets to create a creolized set of beliefs and rituals which would sustain their spirits and encourage their resistance.

Chapter four, “Journey to Freedom,” explores how a select group of men and women at Fort George Island gained their freedom through self-purchase and paternal manumissions. As free people, they leveraged their relationships with their former enslavers to defend their precarious freedom and secure rights and privileges for themselves and their children.

Chapter five, “Life in Freedom,” explores how freedmen and women fought to shape their newfound freedom after the Civil War. Their efforts to reunite families, purchase land, and negotiate the terms of their labor powerfully demonstrate the strength and resilience of the members of a community to survive the trauma of bondage with their spirits intact.

CHAPTER ONE

Origins, Identities and Communities

The enslaved people who lived and labored at Fort George Island came from far-flung locations around the Atlantic world. Some had previously been enslaved in the rice fields of coastal South Carolina and Georgia, where they took advantage of the wartime chaos during the American Revolution to take their freedom, only to be re-enslaved and forcibly relocated to Fort George. Others had survived warfare and capture on the African coast, followed by the hellish voyage of the Middle Passage and dehumanizing auctions in Charleston and Havana before being transported to slave labor camps in East Florida. For these men, women, and children, Fort George Island would never be home. It was but one stop along a traumatic journey of violence, dislocation, separation, and bondage.

John McQueen

After the American Revolution, the Treaty of Paris returned Florida to Spain, ending twenty years of British rule. In 1790, Spain issued a Royal Order offering land grants to Spanish citizens and immigrants who would swear allegiance to Spain. The Spanish government's promise of free land upon which to make fortunes through plantation agriculture enticed hundreds of American and European settlers to East Florida between 1790 and 1810. Evading creditors after the American Revolution, John McQueen left Georgia for Spanish Florida, bringing with him all the valuable property he could carry: over three hundred enslaved people. It was those enslaved people and the labor they would undertake to boost Florida's economy that made McQueen such an attractive immigrant to the new Spanish Governor Juan Quesada. Days after McQueen was baptized in the Roman Catholic Church, Governor Quesada described him as "one of the first to enter this province after issuance of the Royal Order of Permission, and the most valued up to now having listed among his properties more than 300 black slaves." He hoped McQueen would inspire others to emigrate to Florida, "for he is, among them, the finest example."¹

¹ Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 33–4; Schafer, Zephaniah Kingsley, 69; Don Luis de las Casas to the Captain General, 26 June 1791, Reel 8, Bundle 23J2, p.122, Box 1: Folder 37: East Florida Papers, Transcriptions and Translations of Selected Documents, 1783–1821, Stowell Collection, TIMU. After his baptism, McQueen's name was Hispanicized to Don Juan Reyna.

Spanish authorities tapped McQueen to lead an expedition against William Augustus Bowles, a British privateer who had encouraged the indigenous population of Florida to revolt against Spanish rule. As a reward for his loyalty, Quesada granted McQueen Fort George Island in November 1791. By 1793, McQueen had 229 enslaved people laboring for him. Enslaved men began cutting the timber from the island, processed it at his sawmill and built his house on the island. Meanwhile, the enslaved field laborers tilled the soil and planted cotton and corn.²

Many of the enslaved people McQueen brought with him to East Florida considered themselves free and had likely been re-enslaved by McQueen in the chaos of the British evacuation after the Revolution. Soon after McQueen settled with his enslaved laborers on Fort George Island, he sold an enslaved woman called Nansy, along with her husband and two children, to Bartolome Benitez y Galvez, the Intendant of East Florida. In 1792, Nansy sued for her freedom. She petitioned to the governor on the grounds that she and her husband had freed themselves in Charleston during the American Revolution. They were among the tens of thousands of people who escaped from their American enslavers in response to British proclamations of freedom in exchange for service to the British military. In 1779, before the British invasion of South Carolina, General-in-Chief Henry Clinton promised runaways “full security to follow within these Lines, any Occupation which [they] shall think proper.”³ Fugitives from slavery found refuge within British lines—some two hundred enlisting as soldiers and five thousand serving as personal servants, cooks, nurses, laborers, and wagon drivers. After the war, the lack of uniform British policy to protect the self-liberated Black population left their freedom in jeopardy. Jennifer Snyder explains, “Loyal and rebel citizens preyed upon blacks who believed themselves free, kidnapping and selling black men, women, and children and breaking up already tenuous kinship networks.”⁴

In the months leading up to the evacuation of Charleston, the Americans and the British negotiated the fate of the enslaved people who had been freed by the British and those who had been sequestered from the estates of American patriots. Upon learning that the British were planning to carry off thousands of Black people who were within their lines, South Carolina Governor John Mathews threatened to retaliate by seizing the debts owed to British merchants and retaining the confiscated estates of Loyalists. Focusing on

² Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 34–5; Memoranda, “Lands Granted by the Spanish Government of E. Florida to John McQueen,” John McQueen to Eliza Anne McQueen, Fort George, 31 May 1799, in Walter Charton Hartridge, ed. *The Letters of Don Juan McQueen to His Family: Written from Spanish East Florida, 1791–1807* (Bostick & Thornley, 1943), 52–3, 81.

³ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 296.

⁴ Jennifer K. Snyder, “Black Flight: Tracing Black Refugees Throughout the Revolutionary Atlantic World 1775–1812” (Diss., University of Florida, 2013), 94, 106; Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 178.

their own financial interests, the British agreed “that all the slaves of the citizens of South Carolina, now in the power of the honourable Lieutenant General Leslie, shall be restored to their former owners, as far as is practicable, except such slaves as may have rendered themselves particularly obnoxious on account of their attachment and services to the British troops, and such as had specific promises of freedom.” The agreement offered little protection to Black Loyalists, however, as they could not prove “specific promises of freedom” without British officers to vouch for them.⁵

Rather than relinquish Black Loyalists to their American enslavers, many British officers carried them off under the guise of protection, only to sell them in the Caribbean. Lieutenant Colonel James Moncrief, the British Army’s chief engineer during the evacuation of Charleston, transported eight hundred Black laborers in the engineer and ordnance departments to East Florida. Claiming a desire to protect them from the “crueltys which would have been inflicted upon them by their former Masters” should they be returned to South Carolina, Moncrief later sent four hundred of these women and men to Jamaica. His true intentions for relocating the laborers became clear when he requested permission from the governor of Jamaica to transfer them to the Mosquito Coast (present-day Nicaragua and Honduras), to cut mahogany. Upon approval of his application, Moncrief registered the women and men as his slaves, despite previously acknowledging their nominal free status. Within a few years, the British would evacuate the Mosquito Coast, and in the ensuing chaos, 350 of the enslaved women and men escaped into the countryside. Those who were unable to escape included fifty-one women, small children and “4 or 5 old Men,” whom Moncrief sold in Jamaica for £2,000.⁶

Evacuating Loyalists participated in similar schemes, promising freedom and protection to Black Loyalists, whom they later re-enslaved. One freed Black Loyalist, Mary Postell, indentured herself to a Loyalist man, Jesse Gray, who promised to bring her from Charleston to refuge in East Florida. During the evacuation of East Florida, Gray brought Postell and her two daughters to Nova Scotia, where he claimed them as his property and sold Postell and her daughter, Flora. Flora’s new enslaver then brought her back to South Carolina. Desperate to protect her other daughter, Nelly, from a similar fate, Postell managed to file a suit against Gray. Mary Postell’s enslaver may have been the same Mr. Gray whom the commissioner of sequestered estates, John Cruden, accused of carrying people out of South Carolina to sell in the Caribbean. While Cruden was in Tortola, a group of Black people whom Gray had “fraudulently taken away,” pled their case to the

⁵ Ruth Holmes Whitehead, *Black Loyalists: Southern Settlers of Nova Scotia’s First Free Black Communities* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2013), 126.

⁶ Wilbur H. Siebert, “Slavery in East Florida, 1776 to 1785,” *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1932): 153; James Moncrief American Loyalist Claim, Treasury Records, The National Archives, Kew, England, 1/688/241–42, quoted in Jennifer K. Snyder, “Revolutionary Refugees: Black Flight in the Age of Revolution,” in *The American South and the Atlantic World*, eds. Brian Ward, Martyn Bone, and William A. Link (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2013), 81–2, 86, 89.

commissioner after hearing he was on the island. Cruden relayed their complaints to the local magistrate, George Nibbs: “A certain Mr. Gray, under pretence of bringing Negroes from Carolina, to prevent them from being punished by their owners, has either sold, or offered them for Sale, on this Island . . . I have not the least doubt that Gray is guilty, for my information is pointed with respect to his leaving the Island of Jamaica, in consequence of information lodged against him with General Campbell; he having carried on the same trade at the Evacuation of other Garrisons in America.”⁷

Evidently, the re-enslavement and illegal sale of nominal free Black people was all too common during the evacuation of Charleston. In her petition to the governor, Nansy argued that she and her family had gained their freedom during the Revolution, declaring their loyalty to the Marquis de Chappedelaine, the French aristocrat who had purchased McQueen’s Sapelo Island estate. In response, McQueen claimed that during the evacuation of Charleston, “about one hundred and twenty negroes were sent out of the Garrison by the British General to be restored to their respective owners.” These women and men had run to the British in response to Clinton’s proclamation and subsequently found themselves betrayed when the evacuating British commanders allowed American enslavers to reclaim their human property. McQueen told the Florida Governor that they all came to his Sapelo Island plantation, where he fed them for several months at his own expense until their former enslavers came to claim them. The only two who went unclaimed were Nansy and her husband, who at that point had no children. According to McQueen, he eventually received permission to keep them as compensation for the expense of maintaining the others.⁸

McQueen claimed Nansy and her husband as his property, keeping them at Sapelo for the next nine years, until he sold the island to the French Sapelo Company in 1789. After the sale, Nansy and her husband asserted their freedom and challenged McQueen’s right to take them out of state. They appealed to the Marquis de Chappedelaine, one of the new owners of Sapelo Island, “who offered to support them in case their claim was just.” The couple produced a letter from a member of the British military, attesting to their service and loyalty. McQueen dismissed their documentation as a “pretended certificate” which “proved to be nothing more than a note of some hanger on of the army, that they were under his protection to prevent their being employed in other departments.”

While the certificate demonstrated that they had satisfied the terms of Clinton’s proclamation, at the end of the war the Treaty of Paris nullified these proclamations of freedom. Article VII of the Treaty required the British military to evacuate “without causing any Destruction or carrying away any Negroes or other Property of the American

⁷ Whitehead, *Black Loyalists*, 1267.

⁸ John McQueen to Governor, 11 August 1792, East Florida Papers, Reel 47, Bundle 122E10, Document 1972–282; Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 303.

Inhabitants.” Deeming Black Loyalists property and denying their humanity, the treaty contradicted the Americans’ Revolutionary ideals of liberty and equality and betrayed the promises of the British to free their Black allies.⁹

Ultimately, Chappedelaine did not support Nansy’s claim to freedom and there is no further record of her petition. In her efforts to remain first in Georgia and then at Fort George, she had no power but to appeal to elite European men, whose personal interests were tied to the business of slavery. To them, she was simply an enslaved woman, valuable property belonging to their business associate or political ally. Well aware of the insurmountable odds, Nansy continuously contested her enslaved status. Her appeals are a testament to her confidence in rejecting her assigned position within the Eurocentric patriarchal power structure and in boldly asserting her identity as a free woman. Among the three hundred Black women and men with whom Nansy arrived at Fort George, one wonders how many others had also liberated themselves during the Revolution only to be re-enslaved by McQueen and forcibly relocated to Spanish Florida.

On September 27, 1793, Thomas Hassett baptized forty-three enslaved children at Fort George Island. Seventeen fathers and nineteen mothers listed in the baptismal record were among those McQueen brought with him from Georgia.¹⁰ Hassett distinguished Juan and Rosa as being “of Guinea,” possibly reflecting that McQueen had recently purchased the African-born couple since moving to Florida. Many had names reflecting their African origins, including Cuffy, Mengo, Niger, Sambo and Sisa. A few, like Hercules, Bacos [Bacchus], and Venus, had mythological names assigned to them by enslavers after being sold in the Americas.¹¹

Enslaved women and men fought to protect their families as McQueen’s financial circumstances threatened to separate them. In 1798, an enslaved woman named Clorinda petitioned the governor to be sold rather than be forced out of St. Augustine and thereby separated from her husband. At that point she had three children: six-year-old Juana was

⁹ Martha L. Keber, “Refuge and Ruin: The French Sapelo Company” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 86, No. 2 (Summer 2002), 173–74. Julien Joseph Hyacinthe de Chappedelaine dubbed himself the Marquis de Chappedelaine. John McQueen to Governor, 11 August 1792, EFP; Gilbert, “Honor in Defeat,” 177.

¹⁰ Hassett, an Irish priest trained in Spain, was assigned to St. Augustine in 1784. He started a catechism instruction program for enslaved Africans. <https://www.stmaryofthelakesparish.org/history-of-catholicism-in-florida>.

¹¹ *Roman Catholic Parish of St. Augustine, Florida, Black Baptisms—Book I, 1784–1793*, Entries 1–49 and 92–389, trans. and abstracted by Charles A. Tingley, taken from microfilm of the original created by the University of Florida Library, St. Augustine Historical Society, Copyright 2014, (in St. Augustine Historical Society Research Library), 138–155, entries 296–339. For Juan and Rosa, see 140, entry 301. For Hercules, see 143, entry 309. For Bacos [Bacchus], see 144, entry 311. For Niger, see 148, entry 321. For Cuffy, see 150, entry 324; For Mengo, see 152, entry 330. For Sambo and Venus see *Roman Catholic Parish of St. Augustine, Florida, Black Baptisms—Book II, 1793–1807*, trans. and abstracted by Charles A. Tingley, taken from microfilm of the original created by the University of Florida Library, St. Augustine Historical Society, Copyright 2016, (in St. Augustine Historical Society Research Library), June 15, 1799, 139, entry 288. For Sisa, see Book II, 343, entry 794. Hassett, an Irish priest trained in Spain, was assigned to St. Augustine in 1784. He started a catechism instruction program for enslaved Africans. <https://www.stmaryofthelakesparish.org/history-of-catholicism-in-florida>.

fathered by an “unknown white” man who may have been McQueen; three-year-old Josef was fathered by Dr. Sterling of London, England; her infant son, Carlos, was the child of Daniel, an enslaved man belonging to McQueen. Clorinda succeeded in keeping her family together: On June 15, 1799, Michael O’Reilly baptized nine enslaved children on Fort George Island. Among them was Carlos, with his parents, Clorinda and Daniel.¹²

McQueen’s enslaved laborers struggled to make a profitable crop at Fort George. By 1803, McQueen’s debts totaled £60,000, putting his human property at risk of sale. To pay off his creditors in England, his son (John McQueen, Jr.) and son-in-law (Robert Mackay) designed a plan which would enable McQueen to retain his landholdings in Florida, as well as his “respectability in point of property” and standing with the Spanish government. The plan required that once again, McQueen’s enslaved community would pay the price for his debts. McQueen, Jr. and Mackay suggested he return to Savannah with his enslaved laborers who would be hired out to rebuild a Savannah River rice plantation. The work would be particularly arduous, as “the fields want much clearing & the Dams & Ditches repairing.” Once they had rebuilt the plantation, they would be sold.¹³ Collateral damage for McQueen’s failed business venture, the families on Fort George would face the repeated trauma of forced migration and separation from kinfolk.

Thankfully for the families on Fort George, McQueen ultimately chose to sell his real estate, rather than his human property. In March 1804, he sold Fort George Island to John H. McIntosh and “hired him the Working Negroes here for 120 dollars the head until the 1st January next.” His desire to leave a legacy for his family influenced his decision and he expressed his “hope yet to leave my poor Negroes to my family.” McQueen eventually transferred his enslaved laborers to his new estate, “Los Molinos de McQueen” on the St. Johns River, where they labored until his death in October 1807. The settlement of McQueen’s estate led to another traumatic separation and relocation for the enslaved families, as some people were sold to East Florida enslavers while others were transferred to McQueen’s heirs in Savannah. Facing impending separation from spouses, parents, and children, enslaved women and men desperately pleaded and negotiated to stay together. Recognizing that displays of emotions could often lead to violent punishment, many held their tongues and stifled their tears while enslavers tore them from their kinfolk and carried them to new sites of bondage. Enslaved men, women, and children suffered overwhelming grief, loneliness, and depression while being expected to perform their assigned duties with a pleasant demeanor which belied their emotional distress. For the rest of their lives, they would carry the weight of this trauma, grieving and praying for their loved ones

¹² Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 36; Slave Clorinda to Governor of Florida, 4 October 1798, East Florida Papers, Reel 79, Bundle 187E15, Document 1798–118; For Juana, see *Black Baptisms, Book I*, 155, entry 339; Josef Sterling, see *Black Baptisms, Book II*, 56, entry 107; Carlos see *Black Baptisms, Book II*, 142, entry 295.

¹³ Robert Mackay and John McQueen, Junior to John McQueen, 14 Nov. 1803, John McQueen to John McQueen, Junior, 5 Jan. 1804 in *The Letters of Don Juan McQueen*, 61–3.

while holding onto the faint hope of reunion. McQueen's grandson John Mackay, visiting St. Augustine in 1836, met with three people formerly enslaved by McQueen. Harry was free, and Andrew and his wife, Wilbee, now belonged to Mr. Arno. They asked "after the old negroes at home" and "expressed great affection and desire to go back to their relations near Savannah."¹⁴

John McIntosh

John McIntosh and his wife, Eliza Bayard, emigrated from Georgia with 140 enslaved laborers. Seventy to eighty field hands, mostly women, cultivated between three hundred and four hundred acres of Sea Island cotton at Fort George. They labored under overseer John G. Rushing in McIntosh's absence.¹⁵ Little available documentation remains of their identities. McIntosh fled to Georgia after serving as a leader of the failed Patriots' Rebellion in 1813. The Patriots hoped to gain land grants in East Florida in exchange for seizing East Florida and turning it over to the United States for annexation. Unable to return to East Florida, McIntosh first rented his lands to Zephaniah Kingsley, Jr. in March, 1814, and eventually sold Fort George Island to Kingsley in 1817 for \$7,000. The Patriot Rebellion devastated all the estates along the St. Johns and St. Mary's Rivers, including Kingsley's Laurel Grove. Evacuating with his wife Anna and his six-year-old son George, Kingsley loaded his remaining enslaved Africans, tools, and moveable property onto four flats and several large canoes. Under the protection of a gunboat, they sailed down the St. Johns River, past the burned ruins of estates torched during the rebellion.¹⁶

Zephaniah Kingsley

Zephaniah Kingsley had grown up in Charleston, having moved there with his parents from England as a boy. While his father would remain loyal to the British and flee to New Brunswick after the American Revolution, the younger Kingsley eventually declared loyalty to Spain at St. Augustine in September 1803. The slave-trader-turned-planter imported

¹⁴ John McQueen to John McQueen, Junior, Fort George 5 Jan. 1804, *The Letters of Don Juan McQueen*, 62–3, 81; *Inventories Made on Account of the Death of Don Juan McQueen*, East Florida Papers, Reel 140, Bundle 309Q13 (1809–1813) Doc. No. 2, Kingsley Plantation Resources Files; John Mackay to Eliza Mackay, 9 April 1836, typescript transcription, Mackay-McQueen Family Papers, Colonial Dames of America, Georgia Society, Historical Collections, Georgia Historical Society; For more on enslaved people's experiences of separation, see Heather Andrea Williams, *Help Me Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 21–88.

¹⁵ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 70; Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 38–9.

¹⁶ Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 42; Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 135; Llorente to Kindelán, December 13, 17, 1813, R62, Section 32, EFP; Archibald Abstracts, Book C-77, (March 11, 1839).

sixty-six enslaved Africans into East Florida over the next five years. In November 1803, Kingsley brought the first ten enslaved laborers from Charleston, likely property he had acquired from his father. The elder Kingsley testified that he placed some of his human property under control of his attorney and “made a deed of gift of them to his children” before he was banished after the war. Among these ten was Abraham Hanahan, who often worked as overseer of Laurel Grove. In May 1804, Kingsley returned to St. Augustine from St. Thomas on his newly purchased ship, the *Laurel*, and requested permission to bring in twenty-five “Negro bozales” (newly imported from Africa). Acknowledging their financial significance, a Spanish official noted, “It is of major importance . . . [for] his plantation, planting on it suffers due to lack of arms to attend it.” On June 15, Kingsley again sailed into St. Augustine with a cargo he had purchased in Havana, including six men, three women, and one boy, “all newly arrived from the coast of Africa.”¹⁷

His enslaved labor force would work under the direction of Abraham Hanahan for more than two years while Kingsley sailed around the Atlantic in his efforts to amass wealth in the trade of African bodies. On April 28, 1806, he sailed into Charleston aboard the *Gustavia*, one of more than 35,000 ships that carried 12.5 million Africans away from their homeland into the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade. Noting the ship’s arrival from “Zanguebar on the Eastern Coast of Africa,” a Charleston newspaper advertisement described the human cargo as “natives of Gondo, Mocoa, and Swabaytie nations, much distinguished by the Planters of Mauritius.” In his role as supercargo, Kingsley represented the ship’s owner, Spencer Man, and was responsible for purchasing provisions for the voyage and selling the human cargo. After the successful venture, Kingsley claimed eighteen enslaved Africans from among the cargo, “privilege slaves” representing partial payment for his services. They arrived at Laurel Grove on July 15, 1806, after a traumatic journey that began more than nine months earlier in the interior of East Africa.¹⁸

The *Gustavia* carried 332 African captives who survived violent raids in their villages and the savage march to the coast in coffles, followed by months of imprisonment in coastal slave forts before embarking on the hellish voyage in December 1805. When the enslaved Africans were brought on board, they would have been assigned a number, stripped naked, shaved, and possibly branded. Men were shackled in pairs with irons on their wrists and ankles to prevent rebellions, which occurred on at least ten percent of slave ship voyages. Women and children were placed in a separate cargo hold, where they were subjected to further abuse at the hands of the ship’s crew. On many slave ships, captains, officers, and crewmembers claimed “favorites” from among the enslaved women, abusing them for their sexual pleasure throughout the voyage. During the four-and-a-half month

¹⁷ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 69, 72–3.

¹⁸ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 73, 80, 84, 87; Jacksonville Courier, April 30, 1806; Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, Voyage ID 25457, accessed October 2021, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/25457>.

passage to Charleston, seventy-four African men, women, and children perished from disease, exhaustion, abuse, and suicide. The crew tossed their bodies unceremoniously into the sea, where sharks encircling the ship waited to devour them.¹⁹

The survivors were part of a diasporic group of 10.7 million African men, women, and children who were sold into chattel slavery in the Americas. The *Gustavia* anchored first at the quarantine station on Tybee Island, Georgia on April 21, 1806. In preparation for the shipboard auction, the sailors scrubbed the stench of waste from the ship, then washed and oiled the enslaved Africans. On April 28, the *Gustavia* docked in Charleston at Gadsden's Wharf on the Cooper River. Three days later, the enslaved Africans endured dehumanizing inspections as prospective buyers felt their bodies and examined their teeth, before purchasing them and dragging them off to a slave labor camp. Kingsley claimed eight men, two women, and eight children from the enslaved cargo and sent them to Laurel Grove aboard Captain Joel Dunn's ship, *El Peje*, while he sailed for New York to visit his mother and arrange his next trading venture.²⁰

Among the enslaved Africans who arrived at Laurel Grove aboard *El Peje* was a pregnant young woman named Munsilna McGundo. Kingsley had selected her as his "favorite" on the *Gustavia*, sexually assaulting her throughout the transatlantic voyage. In February 1807, she gave birth to Kingsley's daughter, Fatimah Kingsley, honoring her Muslim faith by naming her child after the Prophet Muhammad's daughter. Kingsley would emancipate four-year-old Fatimah in March 1811. Munsilna gave birth to several more children during her lifetime.²¹

Kingsley returned to Laurel Grove in October 1806 with three young African women, whom he had purchased in Havana and listed on the cargo manifest of his ship, the *Esther*, as "tres negras bozales." Among them was Anta Majigeen Ndiaye. Senegalese historian Abdou Cisse identified Anta as the daughter of a member of the royal lineage of Jolof. He argues that after Anta's father led an unsuccessful challenge for the throne, the repercussions included his exile and his family's enslavement. Anta, along with other members of her village, was captured in raids by mercenaries from Cayor, sold to slave traders at Goree Island, and carried across the Middle Passage to Havana. Although she

¹⁹ Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, Voyage ID 25457; Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 82–4.

²⁰ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 85–7; Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (University of Illinois Press, 1999), Appendix II: African Imports into Spanish Florida, 1784–1821; For more on the experience of newly arrived Africans in America, see Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

²¹ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 88; For more on the sexual exploitation of enslaved women and girls, see Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (W.W. Norton & Co., 1999) and Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

was just thirteen years old, Kingsley deemed Anta as available for his sexual pleasure, just like Munsilna McGundo. She was pregnant with their first son, George, when she arrived at Laurel Grove in October 1806.²²

Kingsley would manumit Anna, as he called her, along with their three children in March 1811. Kingsley testified in St. Augustine that he “possessed as a slave a black woman called Anna, around eighteen years of age, bought as a bozal in the port of Havana from a slave cargo, who with the permission of the government was introduced there.” Additionally, he stated that “the said black woman has given birth to three mulatto children: George, about 3 years 9 months, Martha, 20 months old, and Mary, one month old.” Kingsley testified that he was the father of Anna’s children, stating that “I have resolved to set her free . . . and the same to her three children.” Kingsley had children with at least three other women—Munsilna McGundo, Sarah Murphy Kingsley, and Flora Hanahan Kingsley—but only referred to Anna as his wife. He entrusted her with the management of his plantations while he was away on business. As a free woman, she would sign her name Anna M. Kingsley.²³

After returning to Laurel Grove with the “tres negras bozales” in October 1806, Kingsley sailed the following March for St. Thomas to resume his slave trading ventures. He purchased two new schooners, the *Industria* and the *San Juan*. He sent ten newly purchased Africans to Laurel Grove in March 1808 aboard the *Industria*, captained by Giles Mumford. Six enslaved men served as Kingsley’s sailing crew on the *San Juan*. When they sailed into the St. Johns River on August 24, 1808, the Spanish customs inspector noted that the crew was comprised entirely of enslaved men.²⁴

By 1811, Kingsley owned approximately one hundred enslaved laborers, mostly young men. They planted about two hundred acres of cotton and one hundred fifty acres of provisions on four estates: Laurel Grove, Springfield, Conesfield, and Drayton Island. In July 1812, during the Patriot Rebellion, Seminoles attacked Kingsley’s Laurel Grove plantation, torching all the outbuildings, killing two enslaved men named Peter and Mortorro, and capturing forty-one others. These included three children under age nine (Andrew, Hannah and Mike) who were separated from their mothers (Polly, Rose and Jenny, respectively). Kingsley never recovered them. They may have stayed with the Seminoles and assimilated into the tribe.²⁵

²² Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 87, 92–3.

²³ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 94; Manumission of Anna Kingsley, March 4, 1811, R172, B376, EFP; Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 41. Kingsley had one son, named Micanopy, by Sarah Murphy Kingsley. Flora Hanahan Kingsley had five children by Kingsley: Charles, Rosana, James, William, and Osceola;

²⁴ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 98–9.

²⁵ Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 42; Petition of Z Kingsley Jr. to Honorable Raymond Reid, Judge of the Superior Court, East Florida Claims, Zephaniah Kingsley Jr. Box 131, Folder 16, Claims, 1843, St. Augustine Research Library, St. Augustine, Florida.

During the Patriot Rebellion, the Seminoles sided with the Spanish against the Americans, whom they feared would take their lands and cattle and re-enslave the Black fugitives from slavery living among them. Governor Kindelán promised to arm the Seminoles and they could keep any spoils of war claimed by their warriors, including enslaved people. For Seminole communities constantly moving into new territories and navigating conflicts among rival European nations, Africans provided essential skills and knowledge as interpreters, hunters, farmers, cattlemen, artisans, and especially as warriors. Kevin Kokomoor argues that “rather than viewing them as convenient for Seminole aggrandizement, we should be viewing Africans as the key to Seminole survival.”²⁶

Kingsley was convinced that some of his kidnapped enslaved Africans had moved west to the abandoned British fort at Prospect Bluff on the Apalachicola River. The British had left the fort well-armed and provisioned to support the Seminoles and Red Sticks against American advancements and to provide a refuge for their Black allies. Known as Negro Fort, the sanctuary attracted over a thousand fugitives from Florida and Georgia, who settled in villages stretching for miles along the river. Kingsley interviewed Colonel Nicholls in Fernandina on Amelia Island in June 1815. According to Kingsley, Nicholls “left the [Negro] Fort well furnished with stores, ammunition, ordinance & provisions guarded by two hundred blacks & all the Creek nation whom he has declared free and independent and made a treaty offensive & defensive with them in favour of G. Britain with whom alone they are allowed to trade.” The maroon community at Prospect Bluff incited anxiety among American enslavers, who saw this bold example of resistance as a physical and economic threat to the stability of the Southeast. Andrew Jackson complained that this “evil of so serious a nature” was “a state of things that cannot fail to produce much injury to the neighboring settlements and excite Irritations which eventually may endanger the peace of the Nation.”²⁷

Upon orders from Andrew Jackson to eradicate this sanctuary for Georgia run-aways, American troops destroyed Negro Fort in April 1816, killing or capturing over three hundred Black warriors. Black survivors sought refuge in the Miccosukee villages along the west shore of present-day Lake Miccosukee near Tallahassee. Perhaps life among the Miccosukee did not offer the freedom they had hoped for. Kingsley’s enslaved laborers eventually left the Miccosukee and sought protection at the Indian trade post at Prospect Bluff. On January 23, 1817, Edmund Doyle wrote, “four negroes came here from the Mikasukys and demanded of me protection which of course was offered; they returned

²⁶ James G. Cusick, *The Other War of 1812: The Patriot War and the American Invasion of Spanish East Florida* (University of Florida Press, 2003), 213–217; Kevin Kokomoor, “A Re-assessment of Seminoles, Africans, and Slavery on the Florida Frontier,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 88 (Fall 2009): 209–36.

²⁷ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 146–7; Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas* (Texas Tech University Press, 1993), 14–5; ZK to Hernandez, Amelia, June 16, 1815, Buckingham Smith Papers, New York Historical Society; Nathaniel Millett, *The Maroons of Prospect Bluff and Their Quest for Freedom in the Atlantic World* (University Press of Florida, 2013), 214–5.

same day to bring the rest of their party.” Doyle did not mention the total number of the party, but stated, “they belong to a Mr. Kingsley of St. John’s River.” It is possible Kingsley reclaimed the group, however, no record confirming their return has been found.²⁸

The 1814 census lists Kingsley as owning twenty-one people: nine men, four women, four boys, and four girls. When they arrived at Fort George Island with the Kingsleys in December 1813, they immediately set to work rebuilding the estate, as all the buildings except the main house had been destroyed during the Patriot Rebellion. After tilling the fields which had lain fallow the year before, they raised Sea Island cotton and food and tended orange groves. In 1816, Kingsley brought another forty Africans to Fort George, enslaved people he had purchased from the estate of slaver John Fraser. Most of these women and men had recently survived the Middle Passage on voyages originating in Rio Pongo, Guinea. In 1810, 126 Africans arrived in Florida aboard Fraser’s *Agila* and another 140 entered on his frigate *Joana*.²⁹

Beginning in April 1828, Kingsley paid two dollars per month plus provisions to hire thirty-six African men from Waters Smith, Marshal of East Florida. They were part of a group of 121 Africans who had been rescued off the Spanish slaver, *Guerrero*, after it was chased onto the Florida Reef by the British schooner, *Nimble*, in December 1827. An Act of March 3, 1819, specified that Africans on slave ships seized by American armed vessels were to be delivered to US Marshals and transported back to Africa. In 1822, the US government established Liberia as a settlement for Africans “recaptured” from transatlantic slave ships. Smith spent some \$3000 of his own money to provide for the Africans’ food, medical care, clothing, and expected to be reimbursed by the government. To recoup his losses, Smith hired out the healthy Africans in April, shortly after they arrived in St. Augustine. The Africans labored for Kingsley until August 1829, when Smith, under orders from the Secretary of the Navy, recalled them for their transport to Cape Mesurado, on the coast of Liberia. They embarked with the other captured Africans on the schooner *Washington’s Barge* on September 30, 1829.³⁰

²⁸ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 148; Doyle to John Innerarity, Prospect Bluff, January 28, 1817, quoted in Mark F. Boyd, “The Panton, Leslie Papers: Letter of Edmund Doyle, Trader.” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (April 1939), 313.

²⁹ Donna Rachel Mills, *Florida’s First Families: Translated Abstracts of Pre-1821 Spanish Censuses* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Mills Historical Press, 1992), 128; Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 135, 144; Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 42; Landers, *Black Society*, Appendix II: African Imports into Spanish Florida, 1784–1821; Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, Voyage ID 37167, Voyage 37141, accessed November 2020, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>.

³⁰ Jean B. Stephens, “Zephaniah Kingsley and the Recaptured Africans,” *El Escribano* 15 (1978): 71–5; Steven D. Singer, *Shipwrecks of Florida: A Comprehensive Listing*, Second Edition (Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 112; “The Abolition of the Slave Trade,” The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, accessed September 2020 http://abolition.nypl.org/content/docs/text/Act_of_1819.pdf; Claude Andrew Clegg III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 4.

When they arrived at Cape Mesurado, the “recaptured” Africans would have to navigate the volatile relationships between African American settlers and the West Africans whom they dispossessed of their land. Founded in 1816, the American Colonization Society spearheaded the movement to resettle African Americans outside of the US and worked with the US government to establish Liberia. The self-styled philanthropic organization attempted to appeal to a broad range of groups with conflicting interests—abolitionists, free Blacks, and Southern enslavers—arguing that it was the duty of the government and patriotic citizens to support colonization both for the benefit of free African Americans and the good of the country. The idea of unfettered freedom in Liberia attracted some 16,000 African American settlers, many of whom had been emancipated under the condition they be deported to West Africa. “The ways in which they reimagined themselves as Liberians, as free people, and as settlers once they left the United States remained informed by their black American past,” argues historian Claude Clegg. “In the process of forging the world’s second black-ruled republic, they also constructed a settler society marred by some of the same exclusionary, oppressive characteristics common to modern colonial regimes.”³¹

The influx of American planters after Florida became an American territory in 1821 profoundly changed race relations in Florida. Fearing his family’s freedom would be in jeopardy, Kingsley established an estate in Haiti for them. The protection of Kingsley’s family required the relocation and separation of his enslaved laborers. Kingsley deeded his San Jose plantation to his son George in 1836 and transferred eighty of his enslaved laborers there. In 1839 Kingsley sold Fort George Island and forty enslaved laborers to his nephews, Kingsley Beatty Gibbs and Ralph King. In the spring of 1842, Kingsley took his remaining enslaved laborers to San Jose, where they would work under the supervision of Kingsley’s nephew, Charles McNeill.³²

Kingsley B. Gibbs

Kingsley B. Gibbs relocated to Fort George with his wife, Laura, in January 1841. For the next twelve years, his enslaved field hands would labor under a series of overseers, planting cotton and corn, as well as sugar cane, potatoes, peas and garden vegetables. In 1850, Gibbs owned fifty-four enslaved laborers: eleven men, eight women, five young women, five young men, twelve girls and thirteen boys. He was both the largest landowner and largest enslaver in the St. Johns District of Duval County, Florida. His expenses, however, forced

³¹ Clegg, *The Price of Liberty*, 3–6; David Kazanjian, “The Speculative Freedom of Colonial Liberia” *American Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (Dec. 2011): 863.

³² Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 43–5; Daniel L. Schafer, Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley, 83; Jacqueline K. Fretwell, *Kingsley Beatty Gibbs and His Journal of 1840–1843* (St. Augustine Historical Society, 1984), 21.

him to sell his properties —Fort George, Batton, Big Sister, Little Sister and Fanning Islands—to John Lewis in 1853. Within six months, John Lewis sold the properties to Charles R. Thomson of Orangeburg District, South Carolina.³³

Charles Thomson

After purchasing the property in 1854, Charles R. Thomson sent more than fifty of his enslaved laborers from Orangeburg District, South Carolina to Fort George Island to cultivate it. Thomson died in the fall of 1855 without a will and his executors enumerated sixty enslaved laborers living on Fort George Island. The executors divided the enslaved laborers among Thomson's heirs in South Carolina but did not transfer them immediately. They remained on Fort George Island for more than two years, raising cotton and corn, while John H. Thomson tried to sell the property. After failing to sell the land, Thomson received permission from David L. Palmer, who held a \$6000 mortgage on the real estate and human property, to remove and distribute the enslaved laborers among Charles R. Thomson's heirs. Thomson transferred them to their new owners in South Carolina in February 1858.³⁴

Charles Barnwell

Within two years, however, several of the enslaved women and men would return to Fort George Island, separated once again from their loved ones who remained in South Carolina. Charles R. Thomson's daughter, Charlotte L. Thomson, married Charles H. Barnwell, who later purchased Fort George, Batton, Big Sister, Little Sister, and Fanning Islands from the estate of his deceased father-in-law for \$6,280. In the spring of 1860, Charlotte, her husband Charles, and their infant daughter, Eleanor Thomson Barnwell, relocated from South Carolina to Fort George Island, bringing with them twenty enslaved laborers. Among those forced to relocate with the Barnwells were likely Linda, Dol, Hetty, Caty, and Hector, whom Charlotte had inherited from her father's estate two years earlier. They would have helped the other fifteen enslaved laborers adapt to life on Fort George Island. Their work that first year would have included tilling and replanting the fields, which had lain fallow for the past two years. Charles Barnwell joined the Confederate Army on Christmas Eve 1863 and no doubt moved his family and human property away

³³ Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 48, 52–54.

³⁴ Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 54, 58; A. S. Salley Jr., "Col. Moses Thomson and Some of His Descendants," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 3 (January 1902): 111–112; Orangeburg District, South Carolina 1850 Census; "List of Personal Property Belonging to Charles R. Thomson," Thomson Probate Record, Duval County, Florida.

from Fort George before leaving. He may have sent them to South Carolina to stay with his family. By the end of the war, Barnwell sold Fort George Island and it became the property of the northern firm, Beach and Keeney.³⁵

³⁵ Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 58–60.

CHAPTER TWO

Life and Labor

The labor of the enslaved men, women, and children on Fort George Island strengthened Florida's economy, enriching the leading planters and politicians. In 1793, 229 enslaved laborers built up Fort George Island for John McQueen's profit. They began cutting the timber from the island, processed it at his sawmill, and built his house, outbuildings, and quarters for themselves on the island. The field hands then began tilling the soil to plant Sea Island cotton and corn. Slow yielding and hard to pick, Sea Island cotton produced long, fine, silky fibers which were valued as the finest in the world. The enslaved engineers built an irrigation system and a water gin to process the cotton. In January 1801, McQueen noted "My Crop of Cotton turned out but short and I have lost so much time In putting up a Water Gin to clean it that I have not yet gined [sic] out a thousand weight of Cotton—it is now finished but not able to work until we get rain to fill my dams."¹

In July 1799, McQueen "found the Musquetoos [sic] so troubling at Fort George that [he] was under the necessity of coming to Town." While McQueen enjoyed the luxury of staying with Father Michael O'Reilly at the convent in St. Augustine, enslaved men, women, and children labored in the scorching heat on Fort George, swarmed by malaria-spreading mosquitos. Lowcountry enslavers did not know that mosquitos transmitted malaria, which they referred to as "country fever" or swamp "miasma." Some people of African descent inherited a partial defense against malaria through the sickle-cell trait and some acquired a certain resistance from their mother's blood in utero if she had survived the disease herself; however, most enslaved adults would have suffered childhood bouts of malaria before building up sufficient immunity against fatal attacks later in life. In his study of enslaved people's treatment and health in the Lowcountry, historian William Dusinger notes that a nonlethal form of chronic malaria compromised the health of many enslaved adults and contributed to higher rates of child mortality in the region. In the winter of 1801, the enslaved community at Fort George suffered from severe health issues which proved frequently fatal. McQueen noted, "every Young person in Florida is laid up with [w]

¹ Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 52–3; John McQueen to Eliza Anne McQueen, 31 May 1799, John McQueen to Eliza Anne McQueen, Fort George, 20 Jan. 1801, in *The Letters of Don Juan McQueen*, 52–3, 56; Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, "Biological Innovation and Productivity Growth in the Antebellum Cotton Economy" *The Journal of Economic History* 68, no. 4 (December 2008): 1131; S.G. Stevens "The Origins of Sea Island Cotton," *Agricultural History* 50, no. 2 (April 1976): 391–92.

hooping cough all my Young Negroes have it to a violent degree . . . About ten days ago Negers Wife Sophy fell dead in an apoplectic fit.”² Sophy may have suffered a brain hemorrhage or stroke.

McQueen’s enslaved laborers struggled to make a profitable crop at Fort George. By the end of the 1803 growing season, the crop did so poorly that McQueen fired his overseer, Mr. Hollingsworth. McQueen complained that “He has turned out a worthless idle fellow . . . He made me on Fort George but 30,000 weight of Cotton in the Seed not a pound of which has been gined [sic] out.”³

In March 1804, McQueen sold Fort George Island to John H. McIntosh and hired to him “the Working Negroes here for 120 dollars the head” until January 1, 1805. McIntosh owned 160–170 people, half of whom (mostly women) cultivated between three hundred and four hundred acres of Sea Island cotton. The enslaved laborers toiled under overseer John G. Rushing in McIntosh’s absence. McIntosh also owned a lucrative timber business. By 1811, between sixty and seventy enslaved men worked with eight to ten white men, cutting and hauling timber along the St. Mary’s River to fulfill McIntosh’s monthly contract: shipping 300,000 feet of timber to Liverpool, England. This labor assignment separated families, as men were forced to live in camps while cutting timber. The gendered division of labor not only forced women to perform more fieldwork, but to also handle increased domestic responsibilities as single mothers while their husbands were away. Overseer John Rushing recalled that he “had a good deal of trouble with the women on account of the absence of their husbands.”⁴

The hard work of the enslaved laborers who had built up Fort George Island under McQueen and McIntosh was destroyed in the Patriot Rebellion. “They burnt every building except the dwelling house, and they stripped the dwelling house to the extent of taking all the locks from the doors.” The African men and women who arrived with Kingsley in 1814 would rebuild the island from the ashes. Within a few days of setting his enslaved laborers to work on Fort George Island, Kingsley sailed to Fernandina with Anna and their children. Kingsley’s overseer immediately set them to work cutting saplings and palmetto fronds to build temporary African-style thatched roof lodgings. Once they had built shelter, they had to till the fields and build barns, outbuildings, and stables. Carpenters had to restore the two-story main house before Kingsley could move in.⁵

² John McQueen to Eliza Anne McQueen, 12 July 1799, John McQueen to Eliza Anne McQueen, 20 Jan. 1801, in *The Letters of Don Juan McQueen*, 54, 56; William Dusinger, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (University of Georgia Press, 2000), 54, 74.

³ John McQueen to Robert Mackay, 4 Mar 1804, in *The Letters of Don Juan McQueen*, 65.

⁴ John McQueen to John McQueen, Junior, 5 Jan. 1804, in *The Letters of Don Juan McQueen*, 62–3, 81; Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 38–9; Rushing is quoted in Frank Marotti, *Heaven’s Soldiers: Free People of Color and the Spanish Legacy in Antebellum Florida* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 20.

⁵ East Florida Claims: Case of John H. McIntosh, 5; Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 136–37.

A large group of women and men took up machetes to clear brush and weeds to prepare the fields to plant corn, beans, peas, potatoes, and sugarcane to supply the needs of the residents. Eventually they would plant Sea Island cotton and other cash crops. The field hands fertilized the fields with animal manure and dried corn and sugarcane stalks. They raked muck in the marshes and spread it over the cultivated fields.⁶

As soon as they completed their temporary shelters, the enslaved Africans began work on permanent housing. Men shouldered axes to cut down trees and split logs. A small group of men gathered oyster shells from the large shellfish refuse mounds (called middens) left around the island by earlier Native Americans. The men shoveled the shells onto wagons and carted them back to the site of their quarters, where they heated the shells in cast-iron kettles to make lime. They then mixed the lime with sand, water, and more oyster shells to make tabby, a cement-like compound used for walls in their houses. From the felled trees, enslaved carpenters constructed rafters, roofs, and cedar shingles.⁷

The laborers constructed thirty-two cabins, arranged in a half-circle facing toward the main house (Figures 1-2). Each cabin was divided into two sections: a kitchen area with a brick-lined fireplace, and a sleeping area, most likely with a children's loft above. Twenty-eight cabins measured twenty-one feet by fourteen feet and were spaced twelve feet apart. Four cabins, measuring six feet longer and four feet wider, and spaced twenty feet from their nearest neighbors, provided additional space and privacy as a reward for the enslaved drivers. Enslaved carpenters also rebuilt the kitchen house behind the main house, where Anna and her children would live. The structure included a sitting room, food prep area, and cooking room on the main floor, and bedrooms on the second floor (Figure 3).⁸

⁶ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 164.

⁷ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 159.

⁸ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 159–61; Jacqueline Renell and Deborah Harvey, *Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve Kingsley Plantation Kitchen House Historic Structure Report* (Hartrampf, Inc, 2005), 9.



Figure 1. Ruins of tabby cabins at Kingsley Plantation, 1981, Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve Collection, State Archives of Florida.

<http://fpc.dos.state.fl.us/commerce/c670367.jpg>

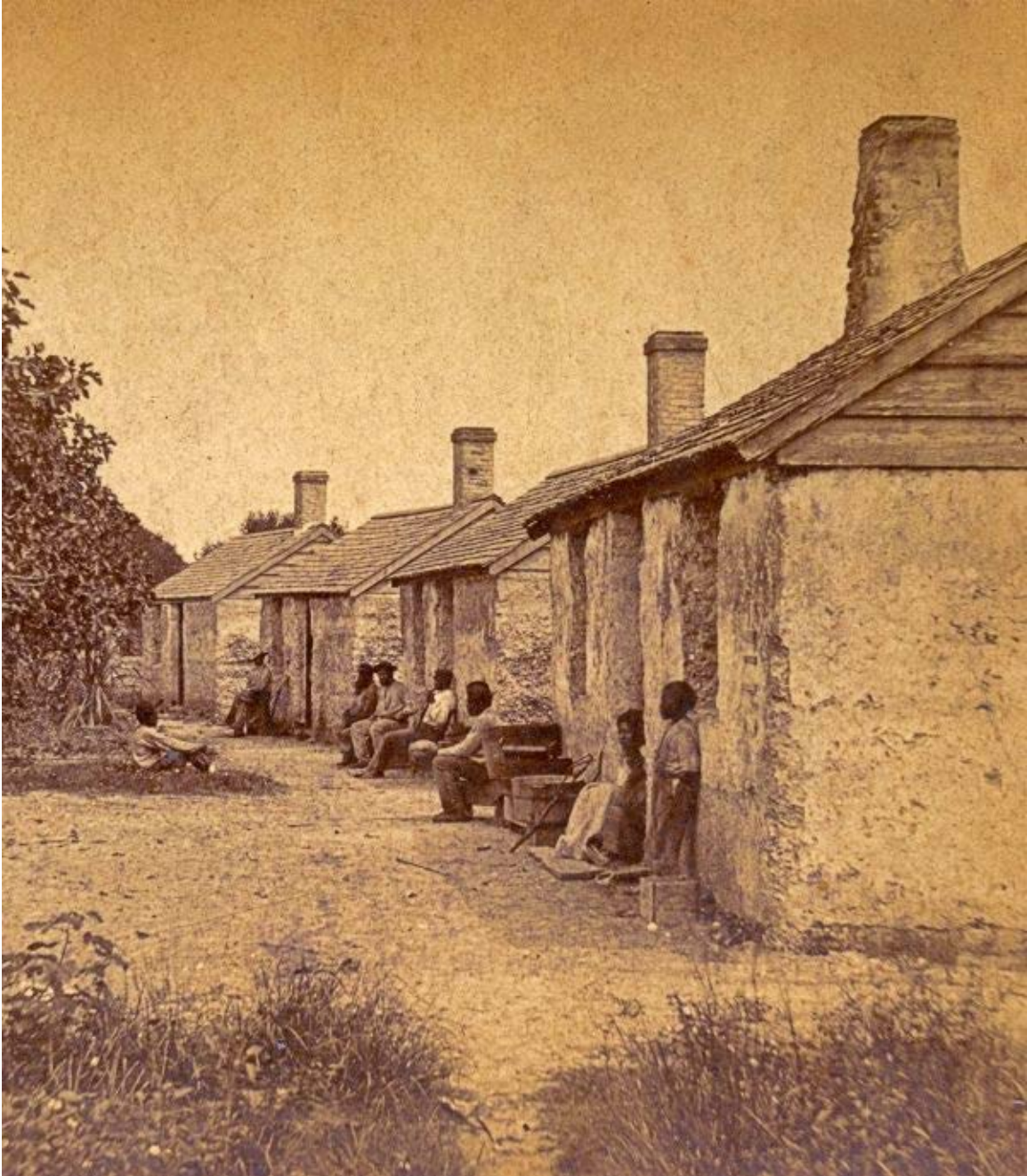


Figure 2. The quarters at Kingsley Plantation, c. 1880. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory.
<https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/318592>



Figure 3. Kitchen, or Anna Kingsley’s House, at Kingsley Plantation
(NPS Photo in Historic Structures Report)

Ship carpenters and caulkers soon began building ships at a makeshift shipyard on the island. Governor Kindelán initially ordered Kingsley to stop construction but would eventually encourage Kingsley’s shipbuilding enterprise. Commander Llorente borrowed two of Kingsley’s enslaved craftsmen to repair a Spanish gunboat damaged in a storm. By October 1814, Kingsley’s boatmen launched the first ship built at the Fort George shipyard.⁹

In addition to shipbuilding, enslaved men built and plied East Florida’s waterways and canals—vital transport infrastructure connecting slave labor camps to the cities in which their cash crops would be sold. In January 1829, Kingsley secured a contract with Colonel James Gadsden for \$13,500 to improve the navigation between the St. Marys and the St. Johns rivers. By July he was employing a large force on the canal project and they completed it a year later. This was backbreaking and dangerous labor, wielding iron picks, shovels, and axes in waters inhabited by snakes and alligators. Rather than risk the health and safety of his own enslaved men, Kingsley would have employed hired Africans to dig the canal.¹⁰

⁹ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 137; Letters between Llorente and Kindelán in February 1814, R62, Section 32; Navarro to Governor, May 2, 24, October 1, 1814, R75, Section 40, EFP.

¹⁰ Jean B. Stephens, “Zephaniah Kingsley and the Recaptured Africans,” *El Escribano* 15 (1978): 73–4; Correspondence from James Gadsden to the Chief Engineer, Florida Territorial Papers, Vol. 24, p. 427.

Beginning in April 1828, Kingsley paid Waters Smith, Marshal of East Florida, two dollars a month plus provisions to hire thirty-six African men who had been rescued off the Spanish slaver, *Guerrero*. After working at Fort George for over a year, the men most likely labored on the construction project, cutting a channel through oyster beds and digging a canal to connect Pine Island Creek and Amelia Sound. The Africans labored for Kingsley until August 1829, when Smith recalled them for their transport to Liberia. Kingsley's overseer informed Smith that three of the men had run away. Eventually the runaways were captured and all thirty-six men would sail to Liberia, after performing unpaid labor for sixteen months to enhance the Florida economy.¹¹

Enslaved men's labor also facilitated transportation along the waterways. Some worked as boatmen, carrying goods and passengers up and down the St. Johns River. Charles H. Olstead recalled a visit to Fort George Island, around 1849. After sailing with Kingsley Beatty Gibbs to Jacksonville "in a fine brig . . . The next morning we returned to Fort George in the plantation boat rowed by Mr. Gibbs' negroes who sang the whole way down the river, a distance of twenty-five miles." Navigating the river was dangerous work which could prove fatal. In June 1842, two enslaved boatmen nearly died attempting to cross the St. Johns Bar at ebb tide. Gibbs recounted the event in his journal. "The Boat, in the breakers breached to, and myself and two negroes were near meeting a watery grave 2½ hours on the broad Atlantic *without hope*, and the sharks abundant. In Gods good mercy, we were all . . . Saved."¹²

A few years later, Gibbs' boatmen performed a harrowing rescue at sea during a storm in October 1846. Recounting the story Gibbs shared with him, Charles H. Olstead wrote:

Some three or four years before our visit, in the midst of a terrific September gale, a passenger steamer, the *Mutual Safety*, plying between New Orleans and New York, went ashore in the breakers off Ft. George Island. Her boats were smashed by the waves and there was every prospect of an awful loss of life for the steamer was beginning to break up. . . . Manning a large boat that he owned with a crew from the plantation Negroes, [Gibbs] made his way through the raging surf, in the face of the fierce gale, out to the unfortunate vessel and brought boat load after boat load in safety to the shore, until every soul on board had been rescued. It was a deed of human daring that could not be surpassed, requiring not only cool, uncalculating bravery but a high measure of physical strength and nautical skill as well.¹³

¹¹ Stephens, "Recaptured Africans," 71–5.

¹² Fretwell, *Gibbs Journal*, 6-7, 10, 28; Lilla Mills Hawes, ed., "The Memoirs of Charles H. Olstead," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 43 (June 1959): 176–79.

¹³ Fretwell, *Gibbs Journal*, 7; Singer, *Shipwrecks of Florida*, 172. Singer describes the *Mutual Safety* as a "Sidewheel steamer, 420 tons, built in 1842 in New York. Stranded on the St. Johns Bar, Oct. 11, 1846."

In relating the event to Olstead, Gibbs had cast himself as the hero of the story. A more accurate account would center the enslaved boatmen who plied those waters every day. They would have rowed the boat back and forth through the pounding waves and fierce winds, carrying the passengers to safety. It was their “uncalculating bravery” and “high measure of physical strength and nautical skill” that saved the day.

The vast majority of enslaved men, women, and children living on Fort George Island labored in the fields, cultivating roughly three hundred acres of cotton. Zephaniah’s nephew, Kingsley Gibbs, studied his uncle’s management style while living at Fort George Island, before purchasing the island from Kingsley in 1838. He detailed the yearly labor assignments in his journal. Throughout the month of January, a group of men, women, and older boys and girls would sort and gin cotton picked the previous year. Another group of men cut bushes, broke ground, and prepared the fields for cotton. Next, they planted seed cane. At the beginning of March, they planted seed potatoes, then corn, then cotton, in weather so cold that frost covered the ground on many nights. By April, as the weather turned warm and dry, they began to hoe the emerging corn, cotton, potatoes, and sugar cane. Throughout the spring, the laborers planted more corn, which they later thinned and hoed. Men began to plow the fields and by the end of May the horse flies swarmed the horses and the men following the plows behind them.¹⁴

In June the cotton was “full of blossoms” and stood “about 1½ ft high.” All hands were busy hoeing and hauling cotton, which would “now be constant work til the end of the year.” In ninety-degree heat, they worked the cane and planted cuttings for sweet potatoes and potatoes. In July, laborers stripped fodder, removing the leaves below the ear of the corn to be used as cattle food. Others plowed and hoed the grass growing in the cotton. When caterpillars appeared in the cotton, a group of men were tasked with digging a ditch through a portion of the fields to stop them from spreading and ravaging the crop.¹⁵

By August, laborers began picking cotton and gathering in the corn. By September, all hands were busy picking cotton and sorting it during rainy weather. A few men split clapboards to repair the quarters. In October, field laborers began ginning the cotton, while others continued to pick cotton and later to dig up potatoes. By November, hands picked, sorted, ginned, and packed cotton, and prepared the fields for the next year’s crop. Men cut, ground, and boiled sugar cane to make syrup. By Christmas, with the fields harvested, the enslaved laborers enjoyed a well-deserved holiday. Gibbs provided them with beef, along with a double allowance of corn and salt so they could share meals with their holiday visitors.

¹⁴ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 173–74; Fretwell, *Gibbs Journal*, 22.

¹⁵ Fretwell, *Gibbs Journal*.

Kingsley and Gibbs employed a management style borrowed from a South Carolina planter who entrusted his driver with “the entire management of every thing.” As Kingsley explained: “The overseer’s duty merely extended to direct the driver on what land he was to raise provisions, and where cotton was to be planted; with this understanding, that all the cotton raised, after it was cleaned and packed, belong to the owner, and that all the hogs, corn and provisions left after supplying the plantation, belonged to the negroes, who might do with it as they pleased.”¹⁶ This management style in which enslaved laborers could earn a share of the fruits of their labors encouraged steady work and compliance. The result was more profit for the enslaver with less effort and expense. Kingsley noted that the planter using this management technique “turned out better crops than any other plantations of equal force in that neighborhood, and the owner had no farther trouble nor expense than furnishing the ordinary clothing and paying the overseer’s wages. . . .”¹⁷ This strategy would serve Kingsley well as an absentee planter, enabling him to leave Abraham Hanahan in charge as the overseer of Laurel Grove, while he engaged in his business of buying and selling enslaved people.

Labor on Fort George Island was organized under the task system, which was common in coastal South Carolina and Georgia. A task for an adult hand consisted of planting, hoeing, or harvesting a quarter acre of land. The system provided greater profits for the enslaver and created more work for the enslaved laborers. Kingsley Gibbs noted that during the long days of summer, “the hand is generally done his task by 2 pm, often sooner, so they have abundance of time to work their *own* crop, fish &c.”¹⁸ While a strong, healthy adult may have finished his or her task by two pm, most would continue working to help their loved ones complete their tasks before moving on to the additional labor of farming, fishing, and hunting required to provide for their own subsistence.

The task system divided enslaved people’s lives between the work they did for their enslavers and the work they did for themselves. Gibbs noted this distinction in his journal in April 1842, “No work done for me to day . . . all the people have to day to plant their own crops.” Each year, Kingsley and Gibbs gave the “hands” one day at the end of April to plant their crops and another day in early October to gather them. While the system created additional work, it afforded enslaved laborers the opportunity to control the fruits of their independent labor. Working their garden plots after completing their daily tasks, ambitious women and men were able to produce a surplus, which they could sell for profit. Describing their weekends, Kingsley noted, “their time was usually employed in hoeing

¹⁶ Fretwell, *Gibbs Journal*, Dec. 25, 1841, 25.

¹⁷ Zephaniah Kingsley, *A Treatise on the Patriarchal, or Co-Operative System of Society as it Exists in Some Governments, and Colonies in America, and in the United States, Under the Name Of Slavery, with its Necessity and Advantages*, 2nd ed., 1829, eBook, digitized by Duke University Libraries, 15, note 13. accessed December 2021, <https://archive.org/details/treatiseonpatria01king>

¹⁸ Fretwell, *Gibbs Journal*, October 5, 1841, 23–4.

their corn, and getting a supply of fish for the week. Both men and women were very industrious. Many of them made twenty bushels of corn to sell.” In 1845, Lindo, Milce, and Jim sold a total of sixteen bushels of corn to overseer Charles McNeill at a rate of seventy-five cents a bushel, earning \$3.37, \$4.52, and \$4.12, respectively.¹⁹

The task system allowed enslaved women and men to engage in an independent economy and they likely traded or sold surplus crops to boatmen arriving at Fort George and to enslaved people on neighboring labor camps. One of the items they likely traded for or purchased with their earnings was clothing. According to Kingsley, the enslaved community “vied with each other in dress and dancing, and as to whose woman was the finest and prettiest.” Enslaved women and men used clothing as status symbols to assert their humanity, instill a sense of pride, and lessen the indignity of their position. Historian Stephanie Camp noted that enslaved women viewed fine clothing as “a symbol of leisure and femininity (and freedom).”²⁰

Women crafted clothing from the allowance Kingsley gave them of coarse, durable fabrics marketed to enslavers as “slave cloths” or “Negro cloths.” After Kingsley’s death, his overseer and executors filed receipts for osnaburg (plain weave cotton cloth), kersey (twill weave wool fabric), shirting, needles, threads, suspender buttons, brogans, and blankets purchased for his enslaved laborers at San Jose. Sewing clothing, along with cooking, cleaning, and childcare, represented additional domestic labor required of enslaved women upon completion of their tasks. In the process of designing their own clothing, they asserted their own individual artistic style and fashion sense. Using needles and thread, they were able to craft dresses and headwraps to suit their individual shapes and tastes. They likely used some of the indigo they worked to dye their garments various shades of blue. Those able to earn money through the sale of their cash crops likely spent some of their income on clothing and accessories, adorning their bodies with the trappings of female beauty reserved for white women. For enslaved women whose bodies were exploited for their physical and reproductive labor, dress enabled them to claim and take joy in their bodies, to delight in feeling like “the finest and prettiest” woman.²¹

¹⁹ Fretwell, *Gibbs Journal*, Oct. 5, 1841, April 30, 1842, 24, 27; Kingsley, *Treatise*, 14, n13; Receipts for Accounts Paid by Charles McNeill at San Jose, April 8, 1845, in Zephaniah Kingsley Probate File 1203 #1, DCC.

²⁰ For more on independent slave economies, see Betty Wood, *Women’s Work, Men’s Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia* (University of Georgia Press, 1995); Kingsley, *Treatise*, 14, n13; Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 83–6.

²¹ Bill & Receipt of Way & King for Summer clothing for San Jose, Sept 7, 1846, Receipt of Perkins & Hopkins Bill Dry Goods, Oct. 19, 1843, in Zephaniah Kingsley, Probate File 1203 #1, DCC; Madelyn Shaw, “Slave Cloth and Clothing Slaves: Craftsmanship, Commerce, and Industry” *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts* 33, (2012); For further discussion of enslaved and freedwomen’s use of dress, see, Tera Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 4; Leslie Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women’s Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 130–31; Marli Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830–80* (University of Illinois Press, 1997), 190; White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?*, 173.

In the chaotic transition after Kingsley's death in 1843, the enslaved women and men asserted their negotiated rights to control their time and labor upon completion of their tasks. After selling Fort George Island and forty enslaved people to Kingsley Gibbs, in the spring of 1842, Kingsley transferred his remaining enslaved laborers to his San Jose labor camp, where they worked under the management of Kingsley's nephew, Charles McNeill. The enslaved laborers resisted McNeill's orders to work his tobacco crops after they completed their tasks. In an 1846 court inquiry, Kingsley's son-in-law John Sammis testified that McNeill, "had some trouble with the negroes after Mr. Kingsley's death. I know some of them ran away in the fall of 1843 and the winter of 1844. I know the negroes refused to obey his order."²²

One of the leaders of this resistance was Romeo, a young single man, valued at \$650 on the 1844 inventory. McNeill flogged him, prompting him to run away with another enslaved man. Determined to make an example of Romeo, McNeill offered "a twenty dollar reward [for his capture], dead or alive, and employed George Hagins to hunt Romeo with bull dogs." The troubles occurred while Sammis was out of state. When he returned, he persuaded McNeill to call off Hagins and the dogs. Sammis promised to find Romeo and return him to San Jose if McNeill agreed to "not beat him cruelly . . . and punish the boy [only] in my presence." Sammis testified that McNeill was "a man of very excitable temperament" but had calmed by the time he brought Romeo back. McNeill "gave him a talking to and did not whip him. He then said the Negroes might do as they please, he would not whip them."²³

Kingsley had employed McNeill as overseer for several years before his death. McNeill's "very excitable temperament" and use of lethal violence disproves Kingsley's patriarchal description of his treatment of his enslaved laborers, where he claimed, "I hardly ever had occasion to apply other correction than shaming them. If I exceeded this, the punishment was quite light, for they hardly ever failed in doing their work well." A reader of Kingsley's 1828 *Treatise* could easily miss the one passing reference he made to more brutal punishment. Kingsley related a time when the enslaved Africans began holding clandestine religious meetings at night and openly defying his control over their lives and labors. "The elders of [the church] held it right to break open my corn house and provide amply for the meeting; so that, finally, myself and the overseer became completely divested of all authority over the negroes. . . . Severity had no effect; it only made it worse."²⁴ One can only imagine the severe physical and psychological violence Kingsley and his previous overseer administered to assert their dominance over the resisting enslaved community.

²² Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 83; Fretwell, *Gibbs Journal*, 21; Zephaniah Kingsley Probate File 1203 #1.

²³ Zephaniah Kingsley Probate File 1203 #1.

²⁴ Kingsley, *Treatise*, 14–5, n13. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*, 130.

Kingsley and his contemporaries described this violence as “correction” or “punishment” rather than calling it what it was: torture. Historian Edward Baptist argues, “Even white abolitionist critics of slavery and their heirs among the ranks of historians were reluctant to say it was torture to beat a bound victim with a weapon until the victim bled profusely, did what was wanted, or both. . . . No one was willing to admit that they lived in an economy whose bottom gear was torture. Yet we should call torture by its name.” While Kingsley argued that his management system would encourage enslaved people to labor willingly, the documentary and archaeological evidence reveals that Kingsley and other enslavers confined and tortured people on Fort George Island. Hannah Rollins described a tabby smokehouse, or possibly a jail, on the property. Stocks have been found in the basement of the main house, however, the NPS staff is unsure whether the stocks were used in the basement or if they were later stored there. Confined in the stocks, enslaved victims could have suffered various forms of torture: solitary confinement in stress positions, whipping, maiming, even sexual assault. Violence meted out against enslaved women and men was designed as public trauma to inflict fear into the psyches of the entire community. Most likely, enslavers at Fort George used the stocks as a public form of torture and humiliation, one of Kingsley’s methods of “shaming them.”²⁵

The ever-present threat of violence was necessary to force men, women, and children to labor like machines, performing repetitive physical tasks which were injurious to their health. In September 1841, Kingsley Gibbs noted, “It is now somewhat sickley on the place, the weather being very hot for the season: but this generally the most unhealthy month of the year.” Their poor health could be attributed not simply to the unseasonably hot weather, but also to the demanding labor assignments during the harvest season, when “all are now busy either at picking Cotton, or in taking in new corn.” At the end of the month, he noted, “I have averaged about 3 negroes sick every day this month.” Gibbs’ journal is silent on healthcare or treatments, so one wonders if his enslaved laborers received lesser care than they had while owned by his uncle. During Kingsley’s tenure on Fort George, Anna Kingsley may have attended to the health of the enslaved community, nursing injuries and ailments. Subsequent to Kingsley’s death, his enslaved laborers at San Jose received occasional visits from Dr. George Rex, Dr. A.L. Baldwin, and Dr. G.K. Holland, who treated them with remedies including hemlock, camphor, and castor oil, and performed teeth extractions when necessary. Kingsley’s executors hired midwives to attend eight expectant mothers between June 1844 and August 1845.²⁶

²⁵ Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 139–42; Kingsley, *Treatise*, 14 n13; Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 289; Tour of Kingsley Plantation with Rangers Emily Palmer and Josh Salestrom, May 2019.

²⁶ Fretwell, *Gibbs Journal*, Sept 1, 1841, 23; Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 193; Zephaniah Kingsley Probate File 1203 #1.

Cotton picking is stoop labor, requiring workers to walk up and down the rows in a bent over position, dragging a long sack behind them which grew increasingly heavy as they worked to fill it. The work was not only taxing on the hands, back, and knees, but also debilitating to the uterus of pregnant and postpartum women. Assuming that women of African descent were naturally suited for childbirth and field labor, enslavers and overseers exploited enslaved women's productive and reproductive labor for maximum profit. They often forced pregnant women to labor up until childbirth and sent new mothers back into the fields before their bodies were sufficiently healed to safely handle the strenuous work. As a result, enslaved women commonly suffered from painful gynecological conditions, including prolapsed uteruses.²⁷

The strenuous labor pregnant women were forced to perform, combined with lack of proper nutrition, medical care, and rest, regularly led to miscarriages, still births, and high rates of infant mortality. Fifty percent of enslaved children died before the age of five. The limited data in Kingsley Beatty Gibbs' journal shows that this was also the case on Fort George under Gibbs' tenure. Four enslaved women gave birth in the years covered in Gibbs' journal (1840-1843). Two of the four children died shortly after birth. In June 1841, Malena gave birth to a son, Alick. The following May, Sukey gave birth to a daughter. Gibbs did not mention these children again, suggesting that they survived at least until the journal ended in 1843. The journal mentions two additional mothers whose children died shortly after birth. In October 1841, Gibbs noted matter-of-factly, "Phebe had a son night before last, it died to day." In April 1843, Lucy gave birth to a child who died two months later.²⁸

The journal mentions the death of two more children, whose ages are unknown. On November 22, 1841, Gibbs noted, "Fanny's child died yesterday." He made no mention of Fanny giving birth, so it is likely the child was born before January 1840 when his journal begins. In May 1841, Gibbs wrote, "negro boy Sandy fell in the river today and was *drowned*." The following day he described, "Hunting for the body of Sandy, which, as I returned today, I found on Talbot Beach and had it buried."²⁹

The enslaved community on Fort George Island survived the trauma of forced labor, violence, and loss by creating a strong Diasporic culture which would sustain their spirits and encourage their resistance. Their efforts to maintain their faith and culture are the subject of the next chapter.

²⁷ Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 33, 36.

²⁸ Sharla Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 179, 185; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 79–80, 83–4; Fretwell, *Gibbs Journal*, 23, 34–5.

²⁹ Fretwell, *Gibbs Journal*, May 9–10, 1841, 22; November 22, 1841, 24.

CHAPTER THREE

Community and Culture

The community of enslaved men, women, and children who labored for Zephaniah Kingsley had origins in cultures from West, Central, and East Africa. First at Laurel Grove and later on Fort George Island, women and men from Senegal, Gambia, the Rio Pongo region of modern Guinea, the Bight of Biafra on the coast of present-day Nigeria, Angola, Kenya, and Tanzania came together to form a new African-descended community in Spanish Florida. At Laurel Grove, an Ibo man named Jacob married Camilla, a woman from the Rio Pongo region of Guinea, creating a household which would blend African cultures separated by over 1000 miles. After the raid at Laurel Grove, the culture of the community who relocated to Fort George Island was further infused with cultural beliefs and practices from more African nations, introduced by “more new negroes” (African-born people) later purchased by Kingsley. These would include seventy-nine enslaved Africans from the estate of John Fraser, many of whom would have come from the Rio Pongo region, as well as the thirty-six Africans illegally smuggled into the Americas on the Spanish slave ship *Guerrero*, whom Kingsley hired in 1828. In their individual families and as a larger community, these women and men combined shared traditions and beliefs into a new Diasporic culture which would sustain them through displacement and enslavement on Fort George Island.¹

There was a distinct African presence on Fort George throughout Kingsley’s tenure. Kingsley’s African community would have included women and men with filed teeth and “country marks,” ritualized scarifications on their faces, chests, or legs to signify membership in a particular culture. An archaeological excavation of the cemetery of enslaved

¹ Little documentation remains regarding the lives of the enslaved men, women, and children at Fort George under McIntosh and McQueen’s tenures. The outbuildings were razed during the Patriot Rebellion and James Davidson has dated the extant archaeological evidence to Kingsley’s tenure. Consequently, this chapter focuses on the enslaved community who arrived after 1813; Zephaniah Kingsley, *Treatise*, 14 n13; Daniel Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 135, 143–44; Jean B. Stephens, “Zephaniah Kingsley and the Recaptured Africans,” *El Escribano* 15 (1978): 73; Zephaniah Kingsley Probate File 1203–1, Jacksonville Courthouse; Zephaniah Kingsley, Records of the Superior Court of East Florida, Box 131, Folder 16, St. Augustine Historical Society; James Davidson, “‘A Cluster of Sacred Symbols’: Interpreting an Act of Animal Sacrifice at Kingsley Plantation, Fort George Island, Florida (1814–39)” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 19, no. 1 (2015): 112.

people at Fort George revealed the remains of a man in his late thirties or forties with highly unusual asymmetrical tooth wear down to the root, which is possibly suggestive of teeth filing.²

Concerned mainly with compliance and productivity, Kingsley condoned African cultural practices as a way to maintain control of enslaved people. In his Treatise he wrote, “I never interfered with their connubial concerns, nor domestic affairs, but let them regulate these after their own manner. I taught them nothing but what was useful, and what I thought would add to their physical and moral happiness.” By allowing them to retain their cultural beliefs and practices, Kingsley aimed to maintain a more contented and profitable enslaved labor force who would not challenge his authority.³ Rather than assigning enslaved Africans English names, a common practice among his contemporaries, Kingsley acknowledged their given names. Ten of the forty adults listed in the appraisal of Kingsley’s property in 1844 had African names: Bonify, Jenoma, Abdalla, Tamba, Penda, Qualla, Yamba, Couta, Tamasa, and Comba. While most would give their children English names, a few passed down their culture through naming practices. At Laurel Grove, an East African carpenter named Jack and his wife Tamasa gave three of their children English names and named their second son Mtoto (Swahili for child).⁴

Believing that allowing enslaved Africans to maintain their cultures would make them more loyal to their owners, Kingsley wrote in his Treatise, “I know two instances, to the southward, where gangs of negroes were prevented from deserting to the enemy by drivers, or influential negroes, whose integrity to their masters, and influence over the slaves prevented it; and what is still more remarkable, in both instances the influential negroes were Africans, and professors of the Mahomedan religion.” Kingsley’s appraisal lists people with Arabic names reflecting their Muslim faith, including a man named Abdalla and a woman named Qualla. They were among an estimated 2.25–3 million Muslims sold into slavery in the Americas. Sylviane Diouf argues that enslaved Muslims went to great lengths to maintain the pillars of Islamic faith because it enabled them “to impose a discipline on themselves rather than to submit to another people’s discipline.” In

² Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (University of Illinois Press, 1999), 80. Landers notes that the Spanish government’s lists of enslaved African runaways in the 1790s provided detailed descriptions of their “country marks,” along with ages, builds and complexions; James M. Davidson, *Interim Report of Investigations of the University of Florida 2010 Historical Archaeological Field School: Kingsley Plantation*, (8DU108) Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve National Park, Duval County, Florida, 2011, 105.

³ Kingsley, *Treatise* 13 n13, 14 n13.

⁴ Kingsley, *Treatise*, 14 n13; Appraisal, 13 March 1844 in Z. Kingsley Probate File 1203-1; Z. Kingsley, Records of the Superior Court of East Florida, Box 131, Folder 16

1807, Munsilna McGundo gave birth to her first child by Kingsley and asserted her Muslim faith and African heritage, naming her daughter Fatima after the Prophet Muhammad's daughter. Kingsley would emancipate four-year-old Fatimah in March 1811.⁵

Isolation in an island society with limited interference from Kingsley and continued importation of African-born people encouraged African cultural retention. Studies of the South Carolina and Georgia Lowcountry have demonstrated how large enslaved communities infused by constant importations of African-born people, limited contact with whites, and the greater autonomy allowed by the task system combined to slow assimilation to Euroamerican culture and enable stronger African cultural retention. Leslie Schwalm concludes that, "the importance of community to slave life in the lowcountry suggests that such factors as the ethnic origins of slaves, their cultural autonomy and independence from white intervention, as well as the geographic—and hence cultural—isolation of the region provided an arena in which African Americans could forge social relations based on shared cultural memories and values." Living and working in similar conditions on Fort George Island, enslaved men and women were able to blend shared elements of their various African cultures to create a creolized language, worldview, and culture.⁶

When they were not working, the members of the enslaved community at Fort George socialized with one another and with visitors from local Black communities. Kingsley wrote: "I encouraged as much as possible dancing, merriment and dress, for which Saturday afternoon and night, and Sunday morning were dedicated . . . and they vied with each other in dress and dancing, and as to whose woman was the finest and prettiest . . . I never allowed them to visit, for fear of bad example, but encouraged the decent neighboring people participate in their weekly festivity, for which they always provided an ample entertainment themselves, as they had an abundance of hogs, fowls, corn and all kinds of vegetables and fruit."⁷ For their dancing, they would have created music through singing, clapping, and string and percussive instruments fashioned from gourds, wood, and bone. They likely passed down cultural traditions through song. Anthropologist Joseph Opala documented a Mende funerary song that was still sung by a Gullah woman in coastal Georgia in the 1930s.⁸

⁵ Kingsley, *Treatise*, 13 n13; Appraisal, 13 March 1844 in Z. Kingsley Probate File 1203-1; Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York University Press, 1998), 48, 162; Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 88.

⁶ Leslie Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 10, 12–13, 64, 71; Erskine Clarke, *Wrestlin' Jacob: A Portrait of Religion in Antebellum Georgia and the Carolina Low Country* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), 7–8; Davidson, "A Cluster of Sacred Symbols," 112.

⁷ Kingsley, *Treatise* 14 n13.

⁸ *The Language You Cry In: The Story of a Mende Song*, produced and directed by Alvaro Toepke and Angel Serrano, researched by Joseph Opala, Cynthia Schmidt, and Tazieff Koroma, California Newsreel, 1998, film.

The homes they built on Fort George Island reflected their traditional African cultures. While slave quarters on most contemporary estates were aligned in two parallel rows on opposite sides of the “street” leading to the main house, the enslaved craftsmen built the tabby cabins on Fort George in a semi-circle (Figures 4-6). In the center was the yard where they performed domestic tasks, socialized, and buried their dead. There are a few possible reasons to account for this design. Daniel Stowell argued that the placement of the quarters provided Kingsley “the best opportunity to observe and control his slaves,” however, Daniel Schafer contends that Kingsley’s house was too far away to exercise control through direct observation. Instead, Schafer suggests that Anna Kingsley may have encouraged the African craftsmen to build their homes in the style of a Senegalese village. “African conceptions of spatial usage, human community, and aesthetics may have influenced the design.” Schafer explains, “The building complex at Kingsley’s plantation symbolically evokes images of circular Wolof villages” like the one Anna Kingsley lived in as a child. Eighteenth century Wolof villages were organized in family compounds, containing multiple homes, granaries, and outbuildings facing an open area in the center, surrounded by a circular wall.⁹



Figure 4. View across the cabin arc, 1875.

<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e0-1104-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

⁹ Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 73; Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 163.

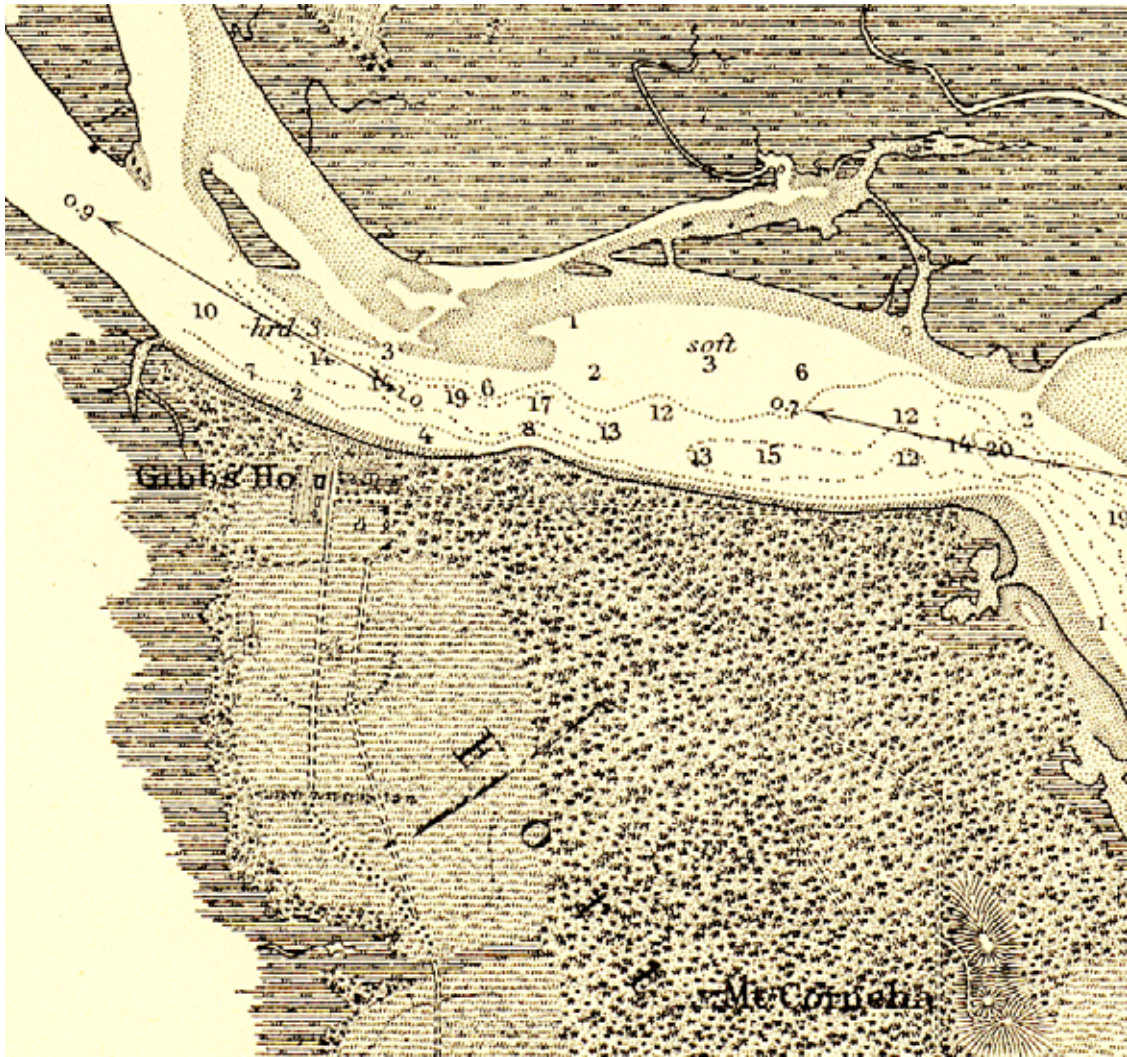


Figure 5. The main house, labeled Gibbs' House, and the arc of cabins can be seen on the 1853 U.S. Coast Survey, Entrance to St. John's River Nautical Chart. State Library of Florida, Florida Map Collection



Figure 6. Arc of cabins in proximity to the main house on Fort George Island.
Courtesy of Google Earth

If Anna Kingsley did influence the design, the layout of the cabins enforced her and Zephaniah Kingsley’s authority. As Schafer notes, the design “also followed a pattern of deference to male authority among the Wolof, with the focal point of the village community being the dwelling of the master or headman at the north end. According to Wolof paternal protocol, visitors would pass first through the men and women of the enslaved community before advancing to the residence of the ‘father,’ or family head.” At Fort George, the layout of the arc would be oriented toward the main house, placing their emphasis on Kingsley as the headman. In terms of social control of enslaved laborers, this is similar to the design of the backlots of Charleston’s residential compounds, which functioned as urban plantations during this time period. Charleston’s urban backlots were designed with the kitchen and stables built on either side of the yard where the enslaved servants lived

and labored. The entire lot was surrounded by a high brick wall to control the movement of enslaved laborers and focus their attention on the work to be performed for their enslavers, rather than the bustling city streets outside the walls of the compound.¹⁰

Another practical reason for the layout was defense. Kingsley's enslaved laborers arrived at Fort George as refugees. They had just survived a violent attack at Laurel Grove in which Seminole warriors had killed two and carried off forty-one of their loved ones. In designing their new homes, defense would have been in the forefront of everyone's minds, Kingsley's in particular. The arc layout of the cabins would provide a buffer against attacks from the woods to the south. Schafer notes that "strangers who entered the compound from the south passed between two roadside dwellings occupied by drivers, people with authority delegated by the master. Theoretically, they could only reach Kingsley after traveling through the entire slave village."¹¹

Regardless of the reasoning behind the design of the quarters, the enslaved community was able to live in a physical space similar in form and function to the villages from whence many of them had come. After their dislocation from Laurel Grove, the survivors of the Seminole attack, who had previously survived attacks and raids in Africa, sought to bless and protect the new homes they built on the burned-out ruins of Fort George Island. Not only did the craftsmen lay out their houses in an arc reminiscent of a West African village, but upon building the new structures, members of the community dedicated and protected them with rituals reflecting their traditional beliefs. Archaeological excavations at Fort George Island have revealed strong African cultural retentions among the enslaved people who lived in the quarters during Kingsley's tenure.

The University of Florida field studies conducted at Fort George Island from 2006 through 2012 discovered two intact animal sacrifices. James Davidson described "an intact juvenile pig buried under the tabby floor of the late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century tabby-walled sugar mill, at its exact center, seemingly carefully placed on its side with its body in a true north/south alignment." He interpreted the pig burial as possibly representing "a dedication or re-dedication sacrifice, derived from an African, British, or creolized act of belief." Of all of the field study's findings, Davidson wrote, "The single most unique discovery was an intact and fully articulated chicken (skeleton), along with an in situ egg, an iron laterite/concretion, and a single glass bead, all buried together under the floor of Cabin W-15" which he concludes was most likely a "sacrifice for house dedication." The chicken sacrifice was buried in the northeast corner of the small inner bedroom, close to the east exterior wall and the wall separating the two rooms. Excavations concluded that Cabin W-15 was occupied during the Kingsley period, 1814–1839, based on the

¹⁰ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 164; Richard Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 61; Maurie D. McInnis, *The Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 178–82.

¹¹ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 163–64.

absence of artifacts introduced by the 1830s and 1840s. Additionally, the cabin was absent from the 1853 US Coastal Survey map of the island, suggesting that it was uninhabitable or in ruins by that date.¹²

Although Zephaniah Kingsley described his enslaved laborers as having “an abundance of hogs, fowls, corn, and all kinds of vegetables and fruit,” their nutrition was a result of their own hard labors. He acknowledged that much of their time not working for him was spent providing for their sustenance: “After allowance, their time was usually employed in hoeing their corn, and getting a supply of fish for the week.” In a place where nutritious food was at a premium, sacrificing an entire laying hen speaks to the strength of their faith. An enslaved man or woman sacrificed the hen and carefully positioned its body. Davidson notes, “The bird’s body was constricted (i.e., wings tightly folded) and in alignment with the east wall of the cabin, with the spine essentially orientated on a true north/south axis. The neck extended from the body northwards, but then turned back towards the south, with the head/beak lying over the lower neck, and the right eye looking straight upward.” The hen’s positioning is reminiscent of the Sankofa bird, one of the more popular symbols among the Akan peoples of Ghana, carved into the eighteenth-nineteenth century Asante traditional shrines known as abosomphie. The bird flies forward with its neck bent backward, a pebble in its beak. Loosely translated as “go back and fetch it,” Sankofa symbolizes learning from the past to move forward into the present.¹³

Intact animal sacrifices have been documented among enslaved communities in Lowcountry South Carolina and Georgia. Field studies have discovered an intact chicken buried beneath the floor of a slave cabin at Frogmore Plantation on St. Helena Island, South Carolina, and an intact sacrificial lamb buried in the doorway of a nineteenth-century slave cabin on the Cherry Hill Plantation in coastal Georgia. Many cultures in West Africa practice animal sacrifice to protect a new home or village. Christopher DeCorse has excavated dozens of African houses at Elmina on the coast of Ghana, dating to the eighteenth century. Under many of these house floors, DeCorse discovered a small pot containing chicken bones, which had been buried during the initial construction of the house. Upon the creation of a new village in early twentieth-century Sierra Leone, the Susu people would sacrifice a goat, burying the animal’s head, feet, and skin in the center of town to make the town steady.¹⁴

¹² Davidson, “A Cluster of Sacred Symbols,” 80, 87–8, 103–4, 110.

¹³ Kingsley, *Treatise*, 14 n13; Davidson, “A Cluster of Sacred Symbols,” 86; James Anquandah, “The People of Ghana: Their Origins and Cultures,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, No. 15, Articles from the Historical Society of Ghana’s Seminars and Conferences 2007–2012 (2013), 18.

¹⁴ Davidson, “Cluster of Sacred Symbols,” 88, 99; C. R. DeCorse, *An Archaeology of Elmina: Africans and Europeans on the Gold Coast 1400–1900* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 182–83; N. W. Thomas, *Anthropological Report of Sierra Leone. Part 1: Law and Custom of the Time and Other Tribes* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1916), 56.

In their religious practices, Africans enslaved at Fort George were able to use some of the same elements common to their homelands. Underneath the sacrificed hen they placed a laterite, or iron concretion, which was naturally formed in both the soils of Fort George Island and in the soils in West Africa. In the pre-colonial era, West African blacksmiths used laterites as raw ore for iron smelting. There were people on Laurel Grove who were familiar with blacksmithing, including “Mortorro the Blacksmith a very prime young man” who was killed by the Seminoles in 1812.¹⁵ Kingsley certainly would have needed another blacksmith in the rebuilding of Fort George. This background in iron-working would shape the cultural retentions at Fort George Island.

Most of the identified cultures in Kingsley’s 1812 list came from the Bight of Biafra, encompassing Ibo and Yoruba cultures where iron working featured prominently within the social and religious practices. Chief among the Yoruba deities is Ogun, the God of iron, hunting, and warfare. Sandra Barnes explains that Ogun emerged from a set of Pan-African ideas that accompanied the spread of iron technology across sub-Saharan Africa nearly 2000 years ago, what she calls the sacred iron complex. “The three most commonly held beliefs in the complex are that iron is sacred, that iron workers are exceptional members of society with particularly high or low status . . . and that *iron workplaces are ritual shrines or sanctuaries for the dispossessed (e.g., warrior refugees)*” (emphasis added). Professor Daniel Offiong at the University of Calabar in Nigeria contends, “In fact nobody builds a new house without first of all asking for the services of a magician or spiritualist to bury some protective charm in the ground.” One common house charm is iron, buried near the doorway.¹⁶ It is not surprising then that the dispossessed African refugees who survived the attack at Laurel Grove would use iron charms to protect their new homes at Fort George.

Davidson surmises that the laterite buried under the hen may have been a sacrifice to Legba. The Yoruba deity Esu (also known as Legba) is seen as intercessor between humans and the gods. Legba figures prominently in religions throughout the Diaspora, as Papa Legba in Haitian Vodou and as Eshu-Elegba in Cuban Santeria.¹⁷ Yoruba scholar J. Omosade Awolalu explains that whenever people seek favor of the gods they must offer a sacrifice to Esu who will carry the message to the spiritual realm. Consequently, “Esu is ubiquitous, found in the market-place, at road junctions and at the threshold of houses.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Davidson, “Cluster of Sacred Symbols,” 104; Z. Kingsley, Records of the Superior Court of East Florida, Box 131, Folder 16.

¹⁶ James M. Davidson, *Preliminary Report of Investigations of the University of Florida 2012 Historical Archaeological Field School: Kingsley Plantation*, (8DU108) Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve National Park, Duval County, Florida, 2012, 26; J. Omosade Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (Brooklyn: Athelia Henrietta Press, 1996), 31; Davidson, “Cluster of Sacred Symbols,” 100, 104; Sandra T. Barnes, ed. *Africa’s Ogun: Old World and New*. Second Expanded Edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 4; Daniel Offiong, *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Magic, and Social Order among the Ibibio of Nigeria* (Lagos: Forth Dimension, 1991), 46–7;

¹⁷ Davidson, “Cluster of Sacred Symbols,” 105.

¹⁸ Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs*, 29.

Esu is typically represented by a piece of laterite rock. African art scholar Robert Farris Thompson explains, “the most important icons of this spirit in Africa are figures in lateritic earth and clay.”¹⁹

In the doorways and corners of their cabins, the enslaved inhabitants of Fort George buried a variety of charms, including iron hoes, an axe head, hatchet blade, plow-share, and stove part. Davidson interprets these iron house charms as reflective of an Ibo/Yoruba cosmology. One of these charms was an iron padlock with three X’s scratched onto the keyhole cover, buried a few steps outside the back door of Cabin E-10. Davidson wonders whether it was “placed there as a yard charm, ‘to lock down’ evil; the side plate of the lock mechanism has the appearance of having been deliberately hammered down to prevent the hasp of the lock from being opened. Are the three inscribed “X’s” representative of Esu, and manifesting his sacred number?”²⁰

Living on an island, the enslaved Africans on Fort George Island would have been particularly concerned with appealing to and appeasing the spirits of the water. The Yoruba believe that maintaining good relationships with these spirits can provide greater catches for fishermen, safe travels for boatmen, and fertility for childless women. An excavation of the well behind Cabin E-11 found a water-polished stone, roughly 1.5 inches in diameter. Davidson surmises: “This water-polished stone may have been a dedication sacrifice, a material correlate of a greater ritual, and symbolic of the enslaved population’s attempt to appease either the earth spirits disturbed by the digging of the well, to bless and protect the water supply from harm, or to periodically use the well as an altar or easy means to offer sacrifice or prayer to spirits of the water (e.g., the Yoruba orisha Yemoja).”²¹

In Yoruba-based Afro-Atlantic cultures, Yemoja is known for her powers over the rivers and oceans and is also associated with women and motherhood. She is called Yemaya in Cuba and Yemanja, Iemanja, and Janaina in Brazil. Allison Sellers explains, “In Nigeria, her primary symbols are the calabash, which are carried by her female priesthood, and small river-worn stones, through which sacrifices are offered to her.”²² An enslaved woman may have deposited the river stone in the well as a supplication to Yemoja, perhaps as a prayer for protection, fertility, or healing. Similar practices have been noted in the

¹⁹ Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983), 20.

²⁰ Davidson, “Cluster of Sacred Symbols,” 109.

²¹ Davidson, *Interim Report*, 2011, 65, 90.

²² Allison P. Sellers, “Yemoja: An Introduction to the Divine Mother and Water Goddess” in Solimar Otero and Toyin Falola, eds., *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 144.

excavations of the Couper Plantation (Cannon's Point) on St. Simon's Island, where archaeologists discovered a polished river stone and a shell concretion in each of the excavated water wells used by the enslaved residents.²³

While Kingsley permitted the practice of traditional African religious customs, he actively discouraged Christian beliefs among his enslaved laborers. Unlike some of his contemporaries who began introducing enslaved Africans to Christianity in an attempt to make them docile, Kingsley was not a religious man. In his will he stipulated "that whenever I may happen to die, that my body may be buried in the nearest, most convenient place without any religious ceremony whatever." Kingsley opposed his enslaved laborers' exposure to Christianity, which he associated with rebelliousness.²⁴

As more Anglo Americans entered Florida in the 1800s, the numbers of enslaved women and men practicing a variation of Protestant Christianity grew. By the early nineteenth century, the widespread religious revivals of the Second Great Awakening inspired enslavers and mission societies to begin instructing enslaved Africans in Protestant doctrine as a means of social control. The emotional nature of revival meetings, with their emphasis on dramatic conversion experiences, animated biblical storytelling and stirring music, made Christianity more accessible to unlettered Black and white members of the crowds. Through the oral tradition, enslaved Africans were able to appropriate the Old Testament stories of liberation from bondage and make the gospel their own. Makungu Akinyela explains, "In the biblical imagery, enslaved Africans were able to find a common source from which to speak their outrage, pain, despair, and hope with the authority of a God who they came to believe was on their side."²⁵

The liberatory message of Black Christianity provoked fear among enslavers, of enslaved people's empowerment and resistance. In 1815, authorities investigated Antonio Williams, a free Black cooper and volunteer in the militia, for preaching to enslaved people in the Mosquitos region south of St. Augustine. Enslavers testified that Williams' preaching incited many of their enslaved laborers to run away to Indian nations. Denying the accusations, Williams attributed the preaching to another Antonio, an enslaved man belonging to Don Juan Bunch. Williams acknowledged that both he and the other Antonio were Anabaptists but claimed the other Antonio encouraged enslaved people to be "faithful to their owners and serve them with love." Although the court ruled that there was insufficient evidence to convict Williams, the court ordered him to leave the province and ordered Bunch to sell the other Antonio out of the province to "warn of the bad results of this sect."²⁶

²³ Davidson, *Interim Report*, 2011, 91.

²⁴ Clarke, *Wrestlin' Jacob*, 26–7, 56–7; Zephaniah Kingsley's Will, July 30, 1843; Kingsley, *Treatise*, 14 n13.

²⁵ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South*, Updated Edition (Oxford University Press, 2004), 132; Makungu Akinyela, "Battling the Serpent: Nat Turner, Africanized Christianity, and a Black Ethos" *Journal of Black Studies* 33, no. 3 (Jan. 2003): 261–64.

²⁶ Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*, 133–34.

Recognizing the influence of preachers on rebellions, Kingsley discouraged the practice of Christianity among his enslaved laborers. He wrote in his 1828 *Treatise*: “All the late insurrections of slaves are to be traced to influential preachers of the gospel, (as, for instance, at Barbadoes and Demarara,) to white preachers, (missionaries) from England. Vesey, who instigated the Charleston plot, was an exhorting brother. Gualla [sic] Jack or Jack the Conjurer was a priest in his own country, M’Choolay Moreema, where a dialect of the Angola tongue is spoken clear across Africa from sea to sea, a distance of three thousand miles.”²⁷ After purchasing his freedom, Denmark Vesey developed a plan to foment a rebellion in Charleston and then sail with the survivors to Haiti. Vesey used the African Methodist Episcopal church in Charleston to organize the revolt and recruit insurgents. Four of his principal lieutenants, including Gullah Jack, were members of the AME church.²⁸

After the trial and execution of the accused conspirators in the summer of 1822, magistrates Lionel Kennedy and Thomas Parker published a “Narrative of the Conspiracy and Intended Insurrection,” in which they highlighted Vesey’s use of religion to inspire his followers: “He rendered himself perfectly familiar with all those parts of the Scriptures . . . and would readily quote them, to prove that slavery was contrary to the laws of God; that slaves were bound to attempt their emancipation . . . and that such efforts would not only be pleasing to the Almighty, but were absolutely enjoined, and their success predicted in the Scriptures . . . In all his conversations he identified their situation with that of the Israelites.”²⁹ David Robertson explains, “Vesey found in the Christian Scriptures, as did the black civil rights leaders of the 1960s, a moral imperative for radical social change. He was enabled to preach an apocalyptic rhetoric that made powerless men willing to fight for their freedom.”³⁰ One enslaved man implicated as a leader in the plot testified, “Vesey said we were to take the Guard house & Magazine to get arms that we ought to rise up & fight for our liberties against the whites . . . & he read to us from the Bible how the Children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt from bondage.” According to the magistrates, Vesey frequently preached from Zachariah 14:1–2 and Joshua 6:21: “Behold the day of the Lord

²⁷ Kingsley, *Treatise*, 13 n13.

²⁸ David Robertson, *Denmark Vesey: The Buried Story of America’s Largest Slave Rebellion and the Man Who Led It* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 47; Scholars have debated the size, extent, and even the existence of the conspiracy. See Michael P. Johnson, “Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators” *William and Mary Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (Oct. 2001): 915–76. Johnson argues that historians have uncritically accepted the witness testimonies in the trial records. At any rate, the court records and Kingsley’s *Treatise* demonstrate that enslavers perceived the situation in Charleston as a very real threat and recognized Afro-Christianity as an inspiration for enslaved people’s resistance.

²⁹ Douglas R. Egerton and Robert L. Paquette, eds. *The Denmark Vesey Affair: A Documentary History* (University of Florida Press, 2017), 74–75.

³⁰ Robertson, *Denmark Vesey*, 47.

cometh . . . For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken” and “they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old . . . with the edge of the sword.”³¹

Vesey enlisted another member of the AME church, Gullah Jack Pritchard, to recruit the African-born contingent. He served as a prominent leader in the conspiracy, using traditional African spiritual beliefs to unite and embolden the African rebels. In his *Treatise*, Kingsley claimed to have carried Gullah Jack from Africa to Florida. “I purchased him a prisoner of war at Zinguebar. He had this conjuring implement with him in a bag which he brought on board the ship and always retained them.” For nearly two decades, Kingsley transported thousands of Africans across the Atlantic and sold them into slavery in the Americas. It is rather remarkable, and questionable, that he would so clearly remember this one man twenty-two years later. If Kingsley did in fact purchase Gullah Jack, he would have carried him across the Middle Passage in the *Gustavia*, which docked in Charleston in April 1806. Although some scholars have assumed that Kingsley brought Gullah Jack to Laurel Grove and that he was among the Africans captured by the Seminoles, Daniel Schafer argues that he sold him in Charleston. Schafer presumes that Paul Pritchard purchased Gullah Jack aboard the *Gustavia* in 1806, however, he does not cite a bill of sale or other documentation which would corroborate Kingsley’s statement.³²

At any rate, by 1818 Gullah Jack was working in Charleston as a caulker and he would become one of Vesey’s principal officers, using his conjuring to embolden enslaved Africans to fight against their owners. Explaining Gullah Jack’s significance in the plot, David Robertson writes that he “could speak the language and use the religious symbolism of those among Charleston’s slaves who did not profess Christianity, or who practiced a second religion in addition to the white people’s Christianity.” Vast numbers of the rebels believed that he was a conjurer with powers which made him invincible. One Black witness described him as “the little man who can’t be killed, shot or taken.”³³ Not only did the Africans believe that he was invincible, they also had faith in the charms he distributed to make them invulnerable. An enslaved man testified that Gullah Jack gave them a crab claw to hold in their mouths, which would prevent them from being wounded.³⁴

Kingsley claimed to respect Gullah Jack’s beliefs and cultural practices, by not taking his conjuring bag from him, which is in line with the level of African spiritual beliefs practiced at Fort George, as evidenced by the archaeological findings. Interestingly, he

³¹ Egerton and Paquette, eds. *The Denmark Vesey Affair*, 74–75, 295.

³² Kingsley, *Treatise*, 13 n13; Daniel Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 32, 80–1; Egerton and Paquette also presume that Pritchard purchased Gullah Jack aboard the *Gustavia*, stating that Prichard testified that he had owned Jack for 16 years. Prichard’s testimony is included in the volume’s documentary evidence; however, he made no mention of how long he owned Gullah Jack. *The Denmark Vesey Affair*, 17, 200.

³³ Robertson, *Denmark Vesey*, 48; Lois A. Walker and Susan R. Silverman, eds. *A Documented History of Gullah Jack Prichard and the Denmark Vesey Slave Insurrection of 1822* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), v.

³⁴ Egerton and Paquette, eds. *The Denmark Vesey Affair*, 173, 196–8.

noted Gullah Jack's influential role in using traditional African spiritual practices to embolden Africans to support the conspiracy, yet it was Afro-Christian beliefs that Kingsley viewed as particularly dangerous. As Kingsley aptly noted, preachers routinely served as leaders of enslaved people's uprisings. Black preachers like Denmark Vesey encouraged enslaved women and men to reject the teachings of enslavers who used Christianity to encourage docility and compliance. While white ministers preached from the book of Ephesians, "servants obey your masters as you would obey God," Black preachers focused on equality under God. Identifying with the Israelites' escape from bondage in Egypt, enslaved African Americans viewed God as a redeemer and liberator. They refashioned Christianity to fit their needs in slavery, fusing Old Testament law with African spiritual practices to create a theology of liberation which served as the basis for their resistance movements.³⁵

Kingsley observed that once his enslaved laborers were introduced to Christianity, their attitudes toward slavery changed. He noted that after relocating to Fort George, he "purchased more new negroes" (enslaved people brought directly from Africa). "A man, calling himself a minister, got among them. It was now sinful to dance, work their corn or catch fish, on a Sunday; or to eat cat fish, because they had no scales; and if they did, they were to go to a place where they would be tormented with fire and brimstone to all eternity. They became poor, ragged, hungry and disconsolate." They were doing more, however, than simply asserting their new religious identities and refusing to work on the Sabbath. For enslaved people, refusing to work is in itself a significant act of resistance. Even more importantly, they were also challenging the notion that they should have to labor throughout the week for Kingsley's profit and then work on their day off to feed themselves. Kingsley noted that after studying Christianity they came to see that "to steal from me was only to do justice—to take what belonged to them because I kept them in unjust bondage."³⁶ Their religious teachings inspired them to challenge Kingsley's ownership of their bodies and labors and to assert their right to the fruits of their labor.

Their new Afro-Christian faith became a source of resistance as well as unity. They began organizing themselves in secret societies, similar to those in West Africa, and held clandestine prayer meetings in the evening: "They accordingly formed private societies under church regulations, where all were brothers and sisters, and, under oath of the most horrid penalty, never to tell or divulge any crime that would bring any brother or sister into trouble, but to lay all the blame on those who had not united with them, and who, of necessity, were obliged to join the fraternity, as soon as possible, in their own defence. They had private nightly meetings, once or twice a week, with abundance of preaching and

³⁵ Douglas R. Egerton, "'Why They Did Not Preach Up This Thing': Denmark Vesey and Revolutionary Theology," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 100, no. 4 (Oct. 1999): 299, 309-315; See also, James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Fortieth Anniversary edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

³⁶ Kingsley, *Treatise*, 14 n13.

praying, (for they all exhorted, men as well as women) with an ample entertainment from my hogs, as it was no sin to steal for the church.”³⁷In his classic study of the invisible church, historian Albert Raboteau explained, “In the secrecy of the quarters and the seclusion of the brush arbors (‘hush harbors’), the slaves made Christianity truly their own.” These clandestine meetings were typically held under a tree believed to have spiritual or protective powers. The Africans at Fort George were attracted to the ancient live oak on the western edge of Palmetto Avenue, which the NPS calls the Witness Tree (Figure 7). The largest tree on the site (with a present-day girth of twenty feet), with Spanish moss hanging from its thick branches, it would have appealed to Africans’ traditional animistic beliefs in the sacred and spiritual powers of nature. Excavations have found the burials of six enslaved individuals around this tree. In burying their dead here, they could pay homage to their ancestors and pray to them to intercede with the gods on their behalf.³⁸



Figure 7. Palmetto Avenue, 1875, The New York Public Library.
<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e0-1102-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

³⁷ Kingsley, *Treatise*, 15 n, 101.

³⁸ Kingsley, *Treatise*, 15 n13; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 212; Davidson, *Interim Report*, 2011, 79–80; Vincent Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Harvard University Press, 2010), 121.

Emboldened by their new faith and united in their secret societies, the Africans overtly resisted Kingsley's control over their lives and labors. According to Kingsley, their clandestine prayer meetings included meals of pork and corn taken without his permission: "the elders of [the church] held it right to break open my corn house and provide amply for the meeting; so that, finally, myself and the overseer became completely divested of all authority over the negroes. The latter even went so far as to consult the head men of the church whether or not, according to religion, my orders ought to be obeyed! Severity had no effect; it only made it worse."³⁹ As noted in the previous chapter, this is Kingsley's only mention of severe punishment in the treatise, a notable exception to his claim of rarely needing to use anything more than light discipline. Kingsley acknowledged that their Christian beliefs had emboldened the enslaved community to overtly resist his authority, yet he denied enslaved women's and men's agency or the ability to think for themselves. He related these points in his treatise, "to show the danger and hurtful tendency of superstition (by some called religion) among negroes, whose ignorance and want of rationality render them fit subjects to work upon."⁴⁰ According to Kingsley, his enslaved laborers had simply been brainwashed by the preachings of the new minister, rather than empowered by a spiritual worldview which upheld their right to control their lives and labors as free people.

Introduced to the concepts of Heaven and a redeeming savior, they began praying for deliverance from bondage. Kingsley wrote that his enslaved laborers came to believe "this was only a place of sorrow and repentance, and the sooner they were out of it the better; that they would then go to a good country, where they would experience no want of any thing, and have no work nor cruel taskmaster, for that God was merciful." Rather than allow Kingsley to continue to own their children, in some cases parents prayed for their deliverance from bondage through death. Kingsley wrote, "I really believe that, in several instances, sick children were allowed to die, because the parents thought conscientiously that it was meritorious to transfer their offspring from a miserable and wicked world to a happy country, where they were in hopes of soon joining them!"⁴¹ In the process, they asserted their roles as parents with agency over their children's lives.

Their Afro-Christian syncretic beliefs were reflected in their funerary practices. Field studies have located six graves near the live oak to the west of Palmetto Avenue. Using associated artifacts, nails, and buttons, Davidson estimated the dates of these burials to between 1800 and 1850. Two men and a woman were interred wearing formal clothing, rather than shrouds, whereas the two children under age five may have been laid to rest in a nightshirt or shift. Each was buried in a coffin, most likely hexagonal in shape, which was custom-made to fit the body after death. The graves were aligned on an east/west axis, with

³⁹ Kingsley, *Treatise*, 14.

⁴⁰ Kingsley, *Treatise*, 14–15, n13.

⁴¹ Kingsley, *Treatise*, 14–15 n13.

their heads to the west, facing east, except for one man with his head at the east, facing west. Given that Kingsley was not a religious man and did not want any religious ceremony for his own funeral, the orientation likely reflects the preference of the enslaved community. The east/west alignment is typical of Protestant Christian burials and is consistent with nineteenth- and twentieth-century African American burial sites, with the deceased buried so that she would not have to turn to answer Gabriel's trumpet sounding in the east.⁴²

Their burials combined Euroamerican traditions—including the use of wooden coffins and burial in tight rows along an east/west axis—with the West and Central African tradition of marking their graves with seashells. Excavations of the cemetery recovered several intact lightening whelks of various sizes. While oyster and clam shells are found all over the island, large intact lightening whelks are very rare and consistent with burial practices in West and Central Africa. Referring to enslaved people's burial practices, Robert Farris Thompson argues, "Nowhere is Kongo-Angola influence on the New World more pronounced, more profound, than in black traditional cemeteries throughout the South of the United States." The practice of marking graves with white seashells reflects Kongo cosmology. In the Kongo, shells symbolize the sea and white symbolizes death and spirits.⁴³

Among the BaKongo people, water symbolizes the Kulunga line, the boundary between the earthly and spiritual realms. Anthropologist Christopher Fennell explains: "The Kalunga line is a boundary for which the surface of water is a metaphoric image, and the mirroring flash of water and other reflective surfaces invokes the immediate interrelation of the land of the living and that of the spirits. . . . spirits pervasively imbue the land of the living, and can be summoned to cross the boundary and come to the aid of an individual, family, or community to provide aid in subsistence and protection against disease, misfortune, and harmful spirits."⁴⁴In death, the spirit crosses the water from the land of the living to the land of the dead. Seashells are used to represent the flash of the water boundary and the connection to the spirit world. In his study of death and mortuary practices among enslaved Africans in Jamaica, historian Vincent Brown argues, "funeral rites shaped moral idioms that highlighted their common humanity and values, often transcending and challenging the dominant mores and imperatives of slavery. Evocations of kinship and ancestry during funerals yoked participants to their past, even in the accelerated world organized by slaveholders' expectant outlook."⁴⁵

⁴² Davidson, *Interim Report*, 2011, 78, 93, 95–6, 105–7, 110. Davidson and his team located six graves, of which they exposed five.

⁴³ Davidson, *Interim Report*, 2011, 100–1, 112; Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 132, 135.

⁴⁴ Kingsley, *Treatise*, 15.

⁴⁵ Christopher C. Fennell, *Crossroads and Cosmologies: Diasporas and Ethnogenesis in the New World* (University Press of Florida, 2007), 31–33, 59; Brown, *The Reaper's Garden*, 62.

On Fort George Island, men and women from throughout East, Central, and West Africa came together to form a distinctly African American community. Combining traditional religions from their diverse homelands with Christian tenets, they created a creolized set of beliefs and practices which would sustain them through slavery in Florida. Through these rituals, the enslaved community at Fort George Island asserted their humanity, challenged their enslavement, and remained spiritually connected to their ancestors and their homelands.

CHAPTER FOUR

Journey to Freedom

Gender and employment skills strongly shaped enslaved women's and men's journeys to freedom from Fort George Island. The men who gained their freedom through manumission were those whose labor made them indispensable to their owners: Harry, the personal servant to John McQueen; Abraham Hanahan, the manager of Zephaniah Kingsley's Laurel Grove slave labor camp; and six African men who built the Kingsleys' estate in Haiti. The women who gained their freedom through manumission were those who bore Kingsley's children: Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley, Munsilna McGundo, Flora Hanahan, and Sarah Murphy. Kingsley offered a "door of liberty" to his enslaved laborers, allowing them to purchase their freedom at half their appraised value. Those in the best position to purchase their freedom were skilled craftsmen, like Carpenter Bill, who could save money through self-hire. After gaining their freedom, women and men leveraged their relationships with their former enslavers to protect their freedom and secure rights and privileges for themselves and their children.

Harry

After John McQueen's death, his enslaved servant Harry gained his freedom, either through self-purchase or possibly as a reward for his dutiful service. Don Bartolomé de Castro y Ferrer described Harry as "McQueen's right hand man and a person of his entire confidence who always accompanied him on his trips." He had traveled with McQueen since the age of twelve and had earned his trust to travel independently all the way to Cuba. Harry was nineteen when he and another enslaved servant, Strephon, accompanied McQueen to Havana in November 1793. They then sailed to Tampa, from whence McQueen and Strephon traveled to St. Augustine on a twelve-day journey through the Lower Creek nation, accompanied by a Native guide. Meanwhile, Harry returned to Havana "in the Kings Brig" to collect McQueen's baggage and bring it back to St. Augustine.¹

¹ Testimony given by Don Bartolomé de Castro y Ferrer, Overseer of the Royal Treasury, Oct. 14, 1807, in Inventories Made on Account of the Death of Don Juan McQueen, East Florida Papers, Reel 140, Bundle 309Q13 (1809–1813) Doc. No. 2 (Kingsley Plantation Resources Files); John McQueen to Eliza Anne McQueen, 1 Dec. 1793 in *The Letters of Don Juan McQueen*, 19.

Given his travels with McQueen, it is not surprising that Harry entered into an abroad marriage with an enslaved woman who lived on a different estate. His wife, Margarita, was owned by Jorge Fleming. On January 18, 1804, Father Miguel Crosby baptized the couple's one-month-old son, Guillermo Enrique. A "free pardo" man, Jeseff Marcelina, stood as godfather.²

Harry was twenty-nine when McQueen died of typhus fever at his St. Johns River slave labor camp, Los Molinos de McQueen, in October 1807. The following day, Governor Enrique White sent Don Bartolomé de Castro y Ferrer to the estate "and see to it that the remains of Don Juan [McQueen] are brought to this city to be given ecclesiastical burial, having the body disinterred in case he has already been buried." Ferrer testified that Harry was "in tears" when he "informed him of his master's demise and pointed out to him the grave where at two o'clock the previous afternoon they had buried him." An enslaved man named Thomas testified that Harry was at McQueen's bedside during his illness. Harry testified that he had "assisted [McQueen] in his sickness until the very end," even dressing the dead man in uniform in preparation for burial. Ferrer took his tears as signs of love and loyalty to McQueen, noting that Harry and "all the other negroes cried at the loss of such a good master."³ More likely, they were crying out of fear for themselves and their families, knowing that McQueen's death would result in division of his property, resulting in the separation of their families.

Under orders of the governor, twelve enslaved men (who had just buried McQueen the day before) were forced to dig up his body and carry it on a stretcher to St. Augustine to be reinterred in the Parish Cemetery. The men walked in the middle of the night, taking turns carrying the coffin on their shoulders, four at a time. They arrived at the city gates around four or five in the morning and from there carried the body to the cemetery where it was buried.⁴

For his dutiful services to McQueen, Harry may have received his freedom. In 1836, McQueen's grandson, John Mackay, was in St. Augustine and found three people formerly enslaved by McQueen. While Andrew and his wife Wilbee had been sold to a new owner, "Old Harry" was then free.⁵ Harry was fifty-eight years old. If he had been manumitted after McQueen's death, he would have enjoyed nearly thirty years as a free man by that point.

² *Black Baptisms—Book II*, 293, entry 690.

³ Dr Way's Report, Burial Certificate, Statement from Gov. White, 12 Oct. 1807, Testimony given by Don Bartolomé de Castro y Ferrer, Oct. 14, 1807, Testimony of Thomas, Testimony of Harry, in *Death of Don Juan McQueen*.

⁴ Testimony of Don Bartolomé de Castro y Ferrer, Oct. 14, 1807, in *Death of Don Juan McQueen*.

⁵ John Mackay to Mrs. E. Mackay, 9 April 1836 in Stowell Collection, Box 2, Folder 26.

Abraham Hanahan

Abraham Hanahan was able to leverage his indispensable role as overseer of Zephaniah Kingsley's Laurel Grove plantation to gain his freedom in 1811. He had belonged to Kingsley's father, and the younger Kingsley entrusted him to oversee the enslaved laborers at Laurel Grove while he engaged in his business of buying and selling people. Hanahan managed the estate alongside the African-born driver, Peter, whom Kingsley described as "a mechanic and most valuable manager." Their valued positions afforded them significant privileges. Both men lived in large "dwelling houses," as opposed to the cramped "negro houses" inhabited by field hands. In their respected positions as overseer and driver, Hanahan and Peter conducted themselves as free men. In 1810, they challenged the authority of the patrol to disarm them and confiscate their property. In the process they asserted their authority over Laurel Grove in Kingsley's absence and their right to private property and gun ownership. Their behavior belied their enslaved status, provoking the authorities and landing them in the Work House.⁶

In Spanish Florida, many enslaved people were allowed to own guns, both for hunting and for defense. East Florida was a no man's land, with constant battles between Spanish, Seminole, British, and American forces. Planters, especially absentee planters, entrusted enslaved men to own guns as a line of defense against raids on their estates. The reliance on armed enslaved men to defend their property was always a risk for planters who realized they might one day turn those guns against them. In 1810, rumors spread of a potential slave rebellion in Georgia. Fearing that the rebellion would spread to Florida, the patrol mobilized to confiscate alleged stockpiles of guns on the surrounding slave labor camps.⁷

On Monday June 4, the patrol came to Laurel Grove while the enslaved laborers were working in the fields. The woman in charge of the house refused to give the patrolmen the keys to the quarters. The locks on the cabin doors indicate that Kingsley allowed enslaved men and women to possess private property. (This practice would continue on Fort George, as archaeological excavations of the quarters found door locks and gunflints.) Typically, the plantation mistress held the keys to the house and pantry, controlling their contents and overseeing the work in those domestic spaces. In Kingsley's absence, an

⁶ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 72, 190; In his inventory of property lost in the Patriot Rebellion, Kingsley valued "Driver Peter's . . . large board house" and another "dwelling house," presumably that of Hanahan, at \$100 each, compared to the "15 new negro houses" inhabited by field hands, valued at thirty dollars each. See Zephaniah Kingsley, Records of the Superior Court of East Florida, Box 131, Folder 16, St. Augustine Historical Society; EFP R125 B28902 doc. 1810, no. 4.

⁷ Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 51; EFP R125 B28902 doc. 1810, no. 4; See also Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*, 207–9, 217, 220.

enslaved woman oversaw the domestic spaces. In defiance of armed white men, she refused to relinquish the keys and the authority they represented. Without the keys, the patrol broke into the enslaved people's homes and confiscated at least eleven rifles from the quarters.⁸

Hanahan challenged the patrolmen's right to take their property and boldly asserted his authority as overseer of Laurel Grove. According to Officer Atkinson, when he explained the orders came from the government, Hanahan "made use of very improper language he answered that he care [not] for that [Judge] Craig, the governor nor anybody else had any right to interfere with his master's plantation." Asserting his political acumen, Hanahan threatened to go above the heads of the armed patrolmen, saying that he would appeal to Judge William Craig and if he did not give him satisfaction, he would go to Governor White. Officers Cook and Atkinson later claimed he said he was not afraid of the governor and he could send him to the stocks but he would have his gun.⁹

The following Monday, the officers held a meeting with "several respectable planters" to discuss what they deemed to be a "crisis." The group considered holding the guns temporarily, but their fears of a "negro army" persuaded them to destroy the guns by tossing them into the St. Johns River. In a bold move that belied his enslaved status, Peter attended the meeting and demanded the guns be returned. In doing so, he asserted the rights of a free citizen to speak freely, participate in town meetings, own guns, and petition for redress of grievances. The necessity for his armed self-defense was borne out two years later when Peter was killed while defending the community during the Seminole raid at Laurel Grove.¹⁰

The authorities declared Peter and Hanahan's expressions "indecent and impertinent," lacking "respect and subordination." They arrested both men. Hanahan asserted his rights, saying "I ask that you place us in liberty." Governor Enrique White sentenced both men to the "Galera de los forzados" (the Work House), fifty lashes and "forced labor for one month in chains or shackles." White acknowledged that the sentence was designed to remind them of their enslaved status, to "make them understand and observe due submission and respect to magistrates." White then ordered Kingsley to replace the men with white managers.¹¹

Hanahan's punishment for defying the slave patrol convinced Kingsley of the need to protect him legally. He arranged for Hanahan's manumission the following year. As a free man he continued to work for Kingsley, traveling up and down the St. Johns River, selling goods Kingsley imported from the Caribbean to farmers and Seminoles. By 1812 he

⁸ EFP R125 B28902 doc. 1810, no. 4.

⁹ EFP R125 B28902 doc. 1810, no. 4.

¹⁰ EFP R125 B28902 doc. 1810, no. 4. Among his property destroyed in the raid at Laurel Grove, Kingsley listed "Driver Peter ... killed same day." He placed his value at one thousand dollars. See, Zephaniah Kingsley, Records of the Superior Court of East Florida, Box 131, Folder 16, St. Augustine Historical Society.

¹¹ EFP R125 B28902 doc. 1810, no. 4; Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 51.

lived on the St. Johns River near Laurel Grove, where he farmed corn. His property included a one-and-a-half-story house, a barn, twenty-two hogs, and two cows. This property was destroyed during the Patriot Rebellion and was valued at \$866 when he petitioned for damages in 1835.¹²

Anna Kingsley, Munsilna McGundo, Flora Hanahan, and Sarah Murphy

The imprisonment and whippings of Hanahan and Peter also convinced Kingsley of the precarious position of his enslaved children and their mothers. On March 4, 1811, Kingsley arranged for their manumission. He testified in St. Augustine that he “possessed as a slave a black woman called Anna, around eighteen years of age, bought as a bozal in the port of Havana from a slave cargo, who with the permission of the government was introduced there.” He added that “the said black woman has given birth to three mulatto children: George, about 3 years 9 months, Martha, 20 months old, and Mary, one month old.” Kingsley testified that he was the father of Anna’s children, stating “I have resolved to set her free . . . and the same to her three children.” Later that year, Anna moved across the St. Johns River from Laurel Grove to a farm of her own at Mandarin Point.¹³

Kingsley also manumitted four-year-old Fatimah, daughter of Munsilna McGundo, whom he had forced to serve as his “favorite” on the voyage of the *Gustavia*. While there is no record of McGundo’s manumission, in every other known instance where Kingsley fathered children by enslaved women, he freed both the mothers and the children. The fact that he provided McGundo with property suggests that he did in fact manumit her. In June 1831, Kingsley executed a trust deed assigning title to Fort George Island to his eldest son George in exchange for ten dollars and “affection & 10 years service.” Kingsley stipulated that “Anna Madgigine Kingsley, mother of George Kingsley, shall possess the use of her house, and whatever ground she may desire to plant, during her life” and that “Munsilna McGundo & her daughter Fatimah, shall possess the use of her house & 4 acres of land—also rations during life.”¹⁴

Perhaps the most complicated of Kingsley’s sexual relationships was that with Flora Hanahan, an enslaved teenager and the daughter of Abraham Hanahan and Sophy Chidigane. Kingsley purchased Sophy Chidigane in Havana along with Anta Madgigine

¹² Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 51; Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 190; Abraham Hanahan v. The United States, Claim for Losses in 1812, Circuit Court Papers, St. Johns County, Florida, Box 124, Folder 24, in St. Augustine Historical Society Research Library.

¹³ Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 51–2; Manumission of Anna Kingsley, March 4, 1811, R172, B376, EFP; Anna Kingsley Probate File 1210, DCC.

¹⁴ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 88, 203; Archibald Abstracts, Book C, p. 1 (July 20, 1831).

Ndiaye (later Anna Madgigine Kingsley) in 1806. The two young women were natives of Jolof and possibly shipmates who experienced the horrors of the Atlantic crossing together. If Kingsley purchased Anna to be his sexual partner, it is possible he purchased Sophy to serve as a sexual partner for Hanahan, almost a gift for his service as overseer of Laurel Grove. At any rate, Hanahan certainly could have used his authority as the overseer to entice or coerce her into a sexual relationship. Like Anna, Sophy had little choice in the matter. In her manumission record, Kingsley described Sophy as “a woman of Jalof, thirty-six years of age, about five feet high, black complexion” freed “for faithful services.” As a free woman, she went by Sophia Hanahan.¹⁵

Kingsley would later take Sophia and Abraham Hanahan’s teenage daughter Flora as his mistress. He manumitted her on March 20, 1828 when she was twenty years old and pregnant with their son Charles. When Charles was five months old, Kingsley purchased three hundred acres on the east bank of the St. John’s River, north of Goodby’s Lake from William Hollingsworth for \$500. Kingsley renamed the estate New Hope Plantation and had Carpenter Bill build a house where he could live with Flora, over thirty nautical miles away from Anna. Kingsley’s son-in-law, John S. Sammis, oversaw the construction of the house and supervised the field labor. Sammis later testified in August 1877 that “Kingsley and Flora cohabitated as man and wife.” He said Flora was “an honest woman and was true to Zephaniah Kingsley.” Kingsley conveyed a deed to the property on June 26, 1829, to his nephew, Zephaniah C. Gibbs, and his brother-in-law, George Gibbs, to be held in trust “considering various services & valuable considerations, for F. H. Kingsley during her life & then for her son Charles.” Flora had four more children by Kingsley at New Hope Plantation: James, Sophia, William, and Osceola.¹⁶

In 1832, Flora’s mother Sophia was also living at the New Hope property, along with her three younger daughters. Sophia and Abraham Hanahan had their daughters, Ana Juana and Josefa Flora, baptized on Oct. 17, 1819. Father Miguel Crosby made no mention of their age, race, or legal status in the baptismal record because by then the family was

¹⁵ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 197, 290; Deed Book, SJCC; *Roman Catholic Parish of St. Augustine, Florida, Black Baptisms—Book III, 1807–1848*, trans. & abstracted by Jose Vigar, St. Augustine Historical Society, Copyright 2012, (in St. Augustine Historical Society Research Library), marginal notes 199–200, under entries 413 and 415.

¹⁶ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 197–98, 290; Archibald *Abstracts, Book A*, pp. 324, 335 (April 10, 1829, June 26, 1829); William James and Osceola Kingsley v. John and Adele Broward, Records of the Superior Court, July 8, 1876; Kingsley v. Broward, the Circuit Court, 4th Judicial Circuit of Florida, Duval County. From Rainey, *Cases Argued and Adjudged*, 19:722–47. Charles Kingsley’s birth date, November 15, 1828, comes from a grave marker at a cemetery in Puerto Plata, DR.; For birth records of James and Sophia Kingsley, see Marriage License and Baptism Records, Box No. X. Records before establishment of Diocese of St. Augustine Parish Records, St. Joseph’s Church Archives, Mandarin, Jacksonville.

living as free. In July 1823, Kingsley manumitted Sophia's two-year-old daughter, Patty, declaring her "henceforward and so long as she shall live, an emancipated and free person having full and perfect liberty."¹⁷

One can only speculate how Sophia and Abraham Hanahan felt about Kingsley's relationship with their daughter. Hanahan's incarceration in 1810 at the orders of the governor and "respectable planters" had taught him that his safety depended on maintaining an association with a man of that status who could vouch for him. Thus, he was not in a position to challenge Kingsley's advances toward his daughter. Perhaps, having seen the privileged status afforded to Anna Kingsley, Abraham and Sophia believed Kingsley's relationship with their daughter would benefit their family. In November 1841, Kingsley moved Flora and her children to Puerto Plata, where Roxana Marguerite Kingsley was born the following year.¹⁸ Presumably, Sophia, Abraham, and their younger daughters joined them. Abraham Hanahan and John Maxwell Kingsley witnessed George Kingsley's will at Puerto Plata on February 14, 1846.

In his will, Kingsley divided his property among Kingsley B. Gibbs, Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley, and his sons by Anna—John Maxwell Kingsley and George Kingsley—Flora Hanahan Kingsley, and Micanopy (his son by an enslaved woman named Sarah Murphy).¹⁹ That these sexual relationships eventually translated into freedom and property does not mitigate the fact that the relationships were forced. Simply put, a sexual relationship between a forty-one-year-old trader and a thirteen-year-old African captive is not a love story. The fact that Anna Kingsley remained with Zephaniah after receiving her freedom is not evidence of her affection for him. As an eighteen-year-old mother of three, stranded thousands of miles from her war-torn homeland, she had no good options. Like Abraham Hanahan, Anna must have realized her relationship with Zephaniah would afford her the necessary protection to maintain her freedom and that of her children.

In the late 1830s, Kingsley encouraged his free Black family members to emigrate to Haiti or "to some land of liberty and equal rights, where the conditions of society are governed by some law less absurd than that of color." Between 1822 and 1844, Haiti controlled the entire island of Hispaniola, including the formerly Spanish portion. To protect his family's freedom, Kingsley purchased an estate in his son George's name in the province of Puerto Plata, present-day Dominican Republic. Since white people were not allowed to become citizens and landowners in Haiti, Kingsley used George's Black privilege there to purchase a tract of land known as Mayorasgo de Koka, which they renamed Cabaret (Figure 8). Meanwhile, he capitalized on his white privilege in Florida to own

¹⁷ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 202; *Black Baptisms—Book III*, marginal notes 199-200, under entries 413 and 415. Zephaniah Kingsley to negro child Patty, Duval County, 5 July 1823, Deed Book B. 93-6, St. Johns County (Kingsley Plantation Resources Files).

¹⁸ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 198.

¹⁹ Zephaniah Kingsley's Will, July 30, 1843.

enslaved people whose labor would support the Haitian settlement. Kingsley explained the contradiction in a letter to Reverend Ralph Randolph Gurley, a prominent member of the American Colonization Society. “I am a planter in the south, deriving my entire subsistence from slave labor, but having a colored family and children, motives of necessity and self-preservation have induced me to labor for a similar object to yours.” In an interview with abolitionist Lydia Maria Child, Kingsley justified his actions, saying “The best we can do in this world is to balance evils judiciously. If I have no negroes to cultivate my Florida lands, they will run to waste; and then I can raise no money from them for the benefit of Haiti.” Rejecting Child’s push for emancipation, Kingsley argued, “To do good in this world we *must* have money.”²⁰

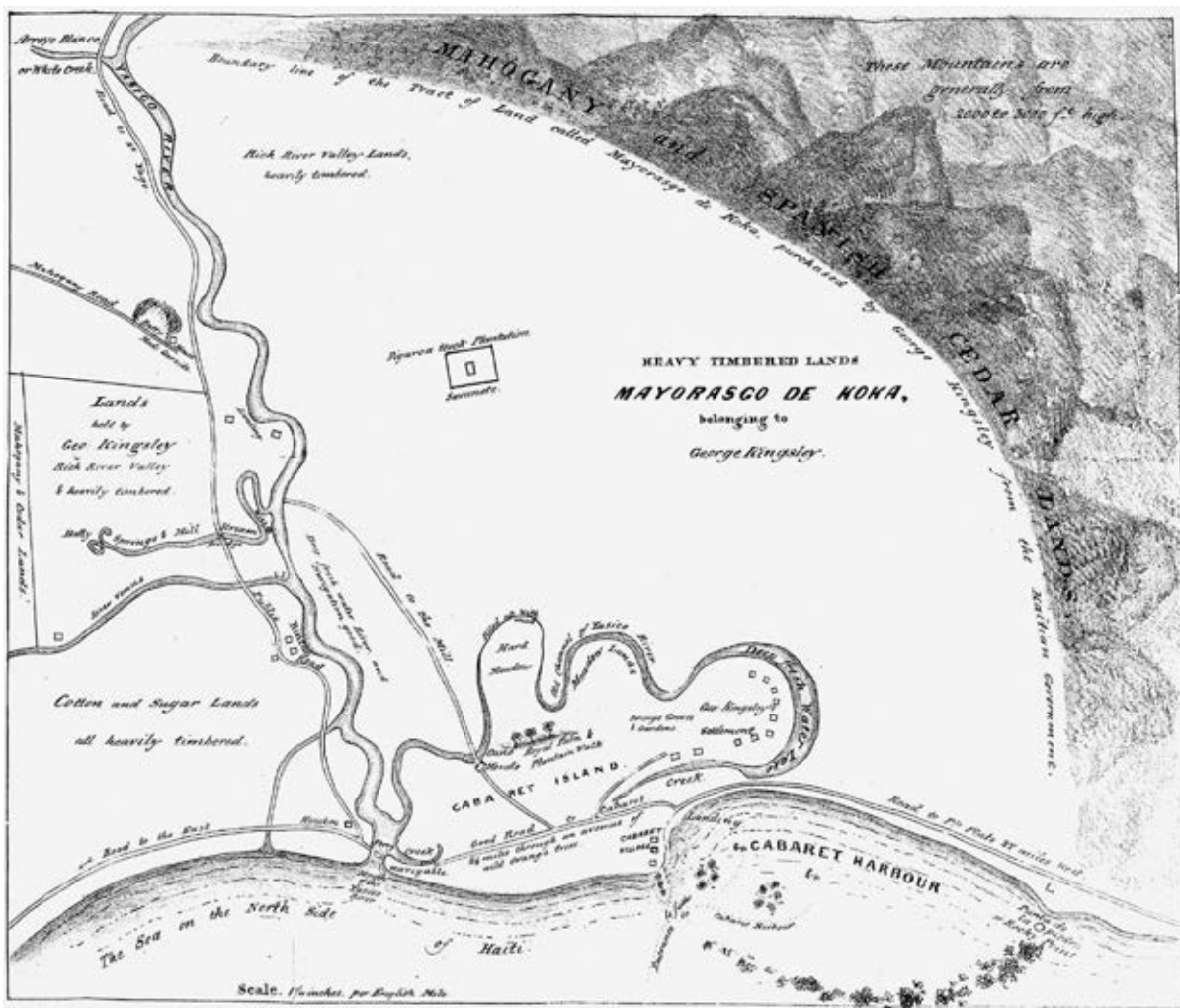


Figure 8. Map of “Mayorasgo de Koka, belonging to George Kingsley,” drawn by Zephaniah Kingsley, in his pamphlet, “The Rural Code of Haiti,” 1838.

²⁰ Schafer *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 5–6, 215, 218; Kingsley to R.R. Gurley, June 30, 1838, *Letters on Haiti*, 102; Lydia Maria Child, “Letter XXIII” in Daniel Stowell, ed., *Balancing Evils Judiciously: The Proslavery Writings of Zephaniah Kingsley* (University Press of Florida, 2000).

“Six Prime African Men”

In October 1836, six men sailed with Zephaniah and George Kingsley to Haiti, to build a refuge for Kingsley’s free Black family. Kingsley described the men as “six prime African men, my own slaves, liberated for that express purpose.” To comply with Haitian law, Kingsley transferred their status from slave to indentured servants for nine years. Upon entry, the six men would have to swear before a Justice of the Peace that they had entered into labor contracts of “their own free will.” Enslaved men could not have entered into a contract with their enslaver of their own free will, especially when Kingsley was keeping their wives and children enslaved in Florida as leverage in case they considered escaping while on the “island of liberty.”²¹

By January 1837, the six men had cut down enough trees from the “thickly timbered” property to begin planting eight acres of corn as well as “sweet potatoes, yams, cassava, rice, beans, peas, plantains, oranges, and all sorts of fruit trees.” They built dwelling and outbuildings for George’s family and “good comfortable log houses all nicely white-washed” for their own families. Additionally, they each cleared five or six acres of land, where they planted their own crops to eat and sell. According to Kingsley, the men became “traders in rice, corn, potatoes, sugar cane, fowls, peas, beans” and saved “thirty or forty dollars apiece” within a year.²²

In October 1837, Zephaniah Kingsley sailed from St. Marys, Georgia, to the Haitian settlement with George Kingsley’s wife, Anatoile, and her children, and the wives and children of the six men who had cleared the land. Other passengers included “two additional families . . . all liberated for the express purpose of transportation to Haiti, where they were all to have as much good land in fee, as they could cultivate, say ten acres for each family and all its proceeds.”²³ These “servants” would also receive “one-fourth part of the net proceeds of their labor from [George’s] farm, for themselves; also victuals, clothes, medical attendance, &c., gratis, besides Saturdays and Sundays, as days of labor for themselves.” While Kingsley described these policies as magnanimous, they were required by Haitian law. “Cultivators” were entitled to one-fourth of the crop they raised, the entire yield of “their own private gardens, cultivated by themselves during their hours or days of rest,” as well as “the necessary medicines.” *The Rural Code of Haiti* guaranteed agricultural laborers a weekend as well. “The labors of the field shall commence on Monday morning, not to cease until Friday evening.”²⁴

²¹ Kingsley to R. R. Gurley, June 30, 1838, Kingsley to George H. Evans, 13 Nov. 1835, in *Letters on Haiti*, 99, 102.

²² Kingsley to Gurley, June 30, 1838, in *Letters on Haiti*, 103.

²³ Zephaniah Kingsley’s Will, July 30, 1843.

²⁴ Kingsley to Gurley, June 30, 1838, in *Letters on Haiti*, 103. “The Rural Code of Haiti,” 11, 14, 30, in *Letters on Haiti*, 104.

The north shore of the island near Cabaret was subject to violent attacks during the revolution in which Spain drove Haiti's Black rulers from the eastern side of the island and regained control of its former colony until a subsequent independence movement drove out the Spanish and led to the creation of the Dominican Republic. Mayorasgo de Koka's prosperity began to decline as the timber resources were depleted. After completing their contracts as indentured laborers, the newly freed families sought economic opportunities away from Cabaret. By then they had become citizens of the Republic and would be able to purchase property, if they could afford to do so.²⁵

Self-Purchase

After settling his family in Haiti, Kingsley mortgaged Fort George Island, along with forty enslaved laborers, to Kingsley B. Gibbs and Ralph King. He later transferred the remainder of his enslaved laborers to San Jose plantation, a three hundred-acre tract in Duval County. The enslaved community would suffer further separation after Kingsley's death in 1843, as families were torn apart through a series of court orders and public auctions. Kingsley's will, filed just two months before his death, was silent on emancipation. It simply directed his executors to allow people to buy their freedom at half their appraised value. Kingsley had dangled this hope as a means of control. In his 1829 *Treatise*, he wrote, "The door of liberty is open to every slave who can find the means of purchasing himself. It is true, few have the means, but hope creates a spirit of economy, industry, and emulation to obtain merit by good behavior, which has a general and beneficial effect." A few men managed to take advantage of this offer to purchase their freedom and save their families from the risk of impending separation.²⁶

John H. McIntosh and Albert G. Philips inventoried Kingsley's property, valuing his eighty-four enslaved laborers at \$29,979. Kingsley's sister, Martha Kingsley McNeill, petitioned to invalidate his will and disinherit his heirs on the basis that Anna Kingsley was "a negress" and that his other heirs were "mulattoes and each a slave of Zephaniah Kingsley" until they "voluntarily and of their own free will and accord" migrated to Haiti and were legally barred from reentering Florida. Judge Crabtree upheld Kingsley's will, awarding nine enslaved people to Anna Kingsley. They were transferred to the plantation of

²⁵ Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 91–2; Kingsley to George H. Evans, 13 Nov. 1835, in *Letters on Haiti*, 101.

²⁶ Kingsley, *Treatise*, 7; Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 201, 219, 231, 233; Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 91.

John Sammis, Anna's son-in-law and agent for her human property. Judge Crabtree ruled that forty-seven of the enslaved people residing at San Jose plantation were legally the property of George Kingsley.²⁷

Subsequent to the transfers to various estates, the enslaved community then suffered the trauma of dehumanizing public auctions which tore families apart. On January 1, 1847, twenty people belonging to the estate of Zephaniah Kingsley were sold "at public action at the door of the Court House." In selecting enslaved people to sell off, the executors separated families as they chose to keep the more valuable men in the estate and liquidated their wives and children. Prince's wife, Julia Anne, and their child, Sally, were sold to Samuel Houston. After being taken away from her husband Brutus, Nancy was sold, along with her daughter Chloe, to Charles McNeill. Her son Joe was sold separately to John Black for \$625. Silvia was sold away from her husband Andrew. She may have considered herself fortunate that John H. McIntosh was willing to pay \$1060 to purchase her together with her children Nanny, Jacob, Adam, and Edwin.²⁸

The women and men who had managed to escape the 1847 auction and remain with their loved ones at San Jose could not breathe a sigh of relief. George Kingsley had died in a shipwreck the previous year. The people who legally belonged to him knew they might not be so fortunate once the executors proceeded to liquidate his estate. In December 1847, John Sammis received clearance from Judge William Crabtree, who ordered "The sale to take place in front of the Court House in this County. The Negroes to be sold in families if practicable, *without sacrificing the interests of the Estate*" (emphasis added).²⁹

A few comparatively fortunate families managed to survive these sales by taking advantage of Kingsley's offer to purchase their freedom at half price. Self-purchase was generally only within the reach of enslaved men who worked in skilled positions as craftsmen, where they enjoyed the privilege of earning wages by hiring their time. Carpenter Bill developed a reputation as a craftsman throughout the area. In slow periods at San Jose, Charles McNeill allowed Bill to hire his time, deeming him "worthy of the privilege because of . . . [his good example] and use upon the place." Planter James McDonald testified that he hired Bill, who "brought a Negro man named Bonafi with him as a 'journeyman' carpenter," but that "Bill was the chief workman. They were at three different periods with me, in all thirty-one and one-half days. . . . I paid Bill \$1 per day. Bill settled with Bonafi what he thought proper." The two African men had worked together for more than forty years, building homes on each of Kingsley's estates.³⁰

²⁷ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 201, 219, 231, 233; Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 91; Kingsley Probate File 1203-1.

²⁸ Kingsley Probate File 1203-1.

²⁹ Order by Judge of Probate of Duval Co, Dec. 2, 1847, in George Kingsley Probate File 1205, DCC.

³⁰ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 237; Deed of Manumission, October 19, 1844, in Zephaniah Kingsley Probate File 1203, DCC; Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 106.

In 1844, Carpenter Bill and his wife Hannah had six children: Frank, Rebecca, Lavinia, Alonzo, Marianne, and Bill. The appraisers of Kingsley's property valued the family at \$4,155.³¹ Even with a generous offer to allow him to purchase his family's freedom at half price, Bill would need \$2077.50 to free his entire family. The family saved up for years, the earnings from his occasional side work at one dollar a day (minus Bonify's wages), together with any earnings they made through raising poultry and corn or other endeavors.

The family was strategic. On October 19, 1844, George Kingsley authorized a deed of manumission for "Carpenter Bill and wife [Hannah] and daughter [Marianne]." By that point, their other daughters had started families of their own. Rebecca had married Sam and had a son, Stephen. Lavinia had married Mike, son of Genoma and Jenny, and the couple had a son, Larry. Bill and Hannah freed their youngest daughter, Marianne, who did not yet have a husband to look after her. In doing so, they ensured that any children she had in the future would be born free. As a free man, Bill went by the name William Kingsley.³²

After purchasing their freedom, William and Hannah Kingsley would live on the estate of Zephaniah Kingsley's son-in-law, John Sammis, and continue to save in an effort to purchase their remaining children. Mary Kingsley married John Sammis, a white New York native who moved to Florida in 1828 and worked as an overseer on Kingsley's White Oak Plantation. In 1831 Kingsley gave the couple title to Little San Jose (aka Ashley's Little Field). Sammis owned eight thousand acres in Duval County and the number of enslaved people he owned increased from thirty-six in 1840 to eighty-five in 1854. Sammis' estate had seven hundred acres planted in Sea Island cotton, rice fields with irrigation systems, a sawmill, and sugar mill that generated substantial wealth. Sammis served as a legal guardian to Anna Kingsley, her family, and the other free Black people living near his Arlington estate, ensuring they were not seized and sold back into slavery, as was possible under Florida law. Together they created a free Black enclave, east of Jacksonville, on a seven-mile stretch of the St. Johns River. Daniel Schafer explains, "Anna's farm, known as Chesterfield, along with the larger estates of her daughters, became the focal points for a rural free black community unlike any other in Florida." The free Black enclave was home to more than eighty people in the 1850s and 1860s when intense white supremacy forced many free people of color to leave the state.³³

³¹ Zephaniah Kingsley Probate File 1203; The appraisers' valuation of Bill and Hannah's family was in line with the average appraised values of enslaved people during this period. Historian Daina Ramey Berry found that between 1771 and 1865, the average appraised values for female and male children were \$190 and \$212, respectively; for young women and men, \$517 and \$610, respectively; for middle-aged women and men, \$528 and \$747, respectively. As a skilled craftsman, Bill would have been valued at \$1000 or more. See, Daina Ramey Berry, "The Price for their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave," in *The Building of a Nation* (Boston, Beacon Press, 2017), 33, 58, 91.

³² Estate of George Kingsley to Oscar Hart, Received Payment of John S Sammis, June 9, 1847, George Kingsley Probate File 1205; Zephaniah Kingsley Probate File 1203; Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 105.

³³ Schafer, Zephaniah Kingsley, 201, 239, 242, 245; Archibald Abstracts, Book B-76 & 176, Book E-61, DCC; Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 95, 102-3, 107-8.

On February 1, 1848, William Kingsley and John Sammis went down to the Duval County Courthouse, where forty people belonging to the estate of George Kingsley were auctioned off outside. William Kingsley stood in the crowd of wealthy planters, while the auctioneer solicited bids on his children after playing up their physical attributes and marketable skills. He would be unable to outbid the planters who clamored to purchase Lavinia and Mike and his grandson Larry. William G. Christopher would offer \$1,300 for the family and also purchased the San Jose plantation at the auction, so Lavinia and her family would remain there.³⁴

When the auctioneer turned to eight-year-old Alonzo, William Kingsley made his bid and waited anxiously, praying that the wealthier men in the crowd would not value his son more than the \$400 he was prepared to offer for him. What relief William must have felt when the auctioneer accepted his bid and called out, “Sold!” Alonzo would now legally belong to his parents, who had saved for four years to purchase his freedom. William and Hannah Kingsley’s eldest son, Frank, and their youngest, Bill, are missing from the records after 1846.³⁵

The 1850 Census of Duval County lists African-born William and Hannah Kingsley living on the Sammis estate with their thirteen-year-old free Black daughter Marianne. Ten years later, the census-taker listed Alonzo Phillips, sharing a household with his seventy-year-old father, William. As a free man, Alonzo had rejected Kingsley’s name and taken the surname Phillips. Hannah is not listed and may have died before the 1860 census. The census-taker listed another household, twenty-year-old Mary Williams (William and Hannah’s daughter Marianne) and her children, Hannah and Nelly, along with a thirty-five-year-old free woman of color named Rebecca Williams.³⁶

Two families managed to purchase their freedom in the aftermath of the trauma of the auction of Zephaniah Kingsley’s estate in January 1847. Kingsley’s executors valued Lindo and Sophy Kingsley and their children, Labo, George, and Philip, at \$1800 in 1844. Sophy and the children were auctioned off on the courthouse steps, while the executors chose to keep Lindo in the estate. While the family’s prayers had been answered when John Sammis purchased Sophy and the children, they refused to leave their fate to the financial whims of enslavers. For years, Lindo and Sophy had raised corn, selling the surplus for profit. By the 1850s, the couple managed to purchase their freedom and that of their

³⁴ Kingsley Probate File 1203-1; Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 238.

³⁵ Kingsley Probate File 1203-1; For more on enslaved parents’ efforts to purchase their children, see Berry, *The Price for their Pound of Flesh*, 63–5.

³⁶ Schafer, *Zephaniah Kingsley*, 239; Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 105.

children. To honor their new identities as free people, they took the surname Wright. The Duval County Census of 1860 lists Lindo Wright, his wife Sophia, and their freeborn children, John and Irandina.³⁷

The 1844 inventory of Zephaniah Kingsley's estate valued Abdallah, his wife Bella, and their children, Paul and Amy, at \$1248. In a document dated September 7, 1846, Paul was listed among the twenty-one people to be auctioned from Zephaniah Kingsley's estate the following January. Abdallah and Bella would be separated from their eldest child, not through sale, but through death. In a list of the property sold after the auction, Executor B.A. Putnam casually noted on a separate piece of paper, "The slave Paul not sold, because he had died before the day of sale." Abdallah, Bella, and Amy were listed among the nine enslaved people Judge Crabtree awarded to Anna Kingsley. The family was valued at \$936. Anna Kingsley eventually allowed the family to purchase their freedom, presumably for \$468. The Duval County Census of 1860 records Abdallah and Bella Kingsley, both African born, as free and living in the rural area that is now the Arlington neighborhood of Jacksonville.³⁸

After gaining their freedom, these families stayed in close proximity to Anna Kingsley and John Sammis, both to defend their precarious freedom and to maintain ties to their relatives who remained in bondage on the estates owned by Kingsley, Sammis and McNeill. Their efforts to maintain their community and assert their newfound freedom after the Civil War will be explored in the final chapter.

³⁷ Kingsley Probate File 1203-1; Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 103, 105.

³⁸ Kingsley Probate File 1203-1; Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 103, 105.

CHAPTER FIVE

Life in Freedom

The 1844 inventory of Zephaniah Kingsley's estate includes Carpenter Bonify and his wife Mary, along with their children Beck, Scipio, Louis, Esther, George, Tena, June, and Sarah. At the 1848 auction, Sammis purchased Bonify, Mary, Esther, and George. He would transfer them from San Jose to his slave labor camp, reuniting Bonify with his old friend and partner, William Kingsley, aka Carpenter Bill. The two likely continued to work together when William needed assistance on a carpentry job.¹ Bonify's family would remain at the mercy of their new enslavers' finances and ultimately be further torn apart during the Civil War. Their story highlights the efforts of the families formerly enslaved at Fort George to maintain their kinship ties and assert their identities as free people after Emancipation.

In April 1862, John and Mary Kingsley Sammis evacuated aboard Union naval transports. Bonify's son, George Napoleon recalled going with the Sammis family to Philadelphia, where he joined Company D of the Twenty-fifth Pennsylvania Volunteers. Before evacuating, Sammis had sold George's sister, Esther, and her husband, Quash Lottery, down to New Orleans. In New Orleans, a planter named John Pratt purchased Esther and Quash Lottery. After the war, Pratt paid for their return to Duval County to reward Esther for hiding his family's treasures from Union troops. They settled "at the joining of Pottsburg and Silversmith Creeks." Like countless other formerly enslaved people who had been forcibly relocated during the war, they articulated their newfound freedom by returning to the places they called home and reuniting with loved ones.²

Bonify's son, Scipio, also managed to return to Arlington after the war. Sammis had sold to him to Arthur Randolph, a physician and planter who enslaved about ninety people on Fort Louis, five miles from Tallahassee. Scipio worked as a wagon driver at the slave

¹ Kingsley Probate File 1203-1; Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 103, 105.

² Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 118–19, 123; Pension claim of Albert Sammis, Application 136,412 and Certificate 503,989, NARA; See testimony in Claim of John S. Sammis, No. 16,153, Records of the Southern Claims Commission, NARA; Schafer, Zephaniah Kingsley, 244-45; "Sammis Slaves Are Still Alive," *Florida Times-Union*, June 21, 1925; Susan Eva O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 139.

labor camp, while his wife, Edith, worked as a weaver. His son Louis, named after Scipio's younger brother, told an interviewer for the WPA that he received a transfer from the government to return to Jacksonville after the war.³

After Emancipation, Bonify signified his freedom with the surname Napoleon. Like other freedmen and women throughout the South, he and his family recognized landownership as the key to securing their freedom. John and Mary Sammis eventually deeded five acres to "Bonify Napoleon during his life, then to [Bonify's son] George Gaston and his heirs for past services." Upon returning from Tallahassee after the war, Bonify's eldest son, Scipio Napoleon, worked for Mr. Hatee. He saved and bought land from him in Arlington. Scipio's eldest son Louis worked for Governor Reed, herding cattle across the St. Johns River. In 1936, Louis had retained the property his father had purchased, while his younger brother owned "a fair sized orange grove on the south side of Jacksonville."⁴

Those who had purchased their freedom before the war took advantage of their head start on freedom to save money and invest in property. Lindo and Sophia Wright had purchased their freedom in the 1850s, and in 1860 were living with their freeborn children, John and Irandina. On March 14, 1868, Lindo Wright purchased twenty acres of the "Branchester Tract" on the east bank of the St. Johns from Robert Bigelow for four hundred dollars. The following month, he purchased thirty-one acres from the State of Florida for \$15.50. In 1878, John Sammis served as a trustee for Lindo's surviving heirs: Sophia, Labo, Joseph, and Elizabeth.⁵

Three miles north of the Branchester property, William Kingsley's son, Alonzo H. Philips, purchased fifteen acres from Martha Baxter (Anna and Zephaniah Kingsley's daughter) for three hundred dollars in 1869. This property was the northwest corner of the 347-acre St. Isabel Plantation that Zephaniah Kingsley had conveyed to his daughter in 1841. During the Civil War, Philips had served for three years as a commissary sergeant in Company A, Twenty-first US Colored Infantry. In 1921, he was still living on his fifteen-acre tract, though the area had been renamed Chaseville.⁶ The price Philips paid for his land was one hundred dollars less than what his father had paid to purchase him at auction in 1848. Imagine how much wealth the family could have attained had William Kingsley been free to use his carpentry earnings to purchase land and build houses for rent or sale, rather than to buy himself and his family out of slavery.

³ "Louis Napoleon," *The Federal Writers Project*, Jacksonville, 1936, accessed December 2021, <https://digital.lib.usf.edu/SFS0021859/00001>

⁴ Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 123; O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 142–43; "Louis Napoleon."

⁵ Archibald Abstracts, Book R, 120 (March 14, 1868, April 2, 1868); Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 103, 105, 123.

⁶ Archibald Abstracts, Book R, 191 (September 22, 1869), Book E, 61 (Nov. 8, 1841); Schafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, 124, 128; 1860 Census of Duval Co.; Alonzo Phillips' pension record, number 839,934, Civil War Pension Files, RG 15, NARA.

Those who were not fortunate enough to acquire land after the Civil War were typically forced to labor as sharecroppers. Their lives likely did not feel radically different after Emancipation. By the end of the war, Charles Barnwell sold Fort George Island and it became the property of the northern firm, Beach and Keeney. Between 1866 and 1869, freedmen and women stayed on the island, farming small plots of land. In July 1868, the Wallace family (Lou, his wife, and four children) and the Bradley family (William, his wife and two children) received rations from the Freedmen's Bureau. Each family was farming ten acres of land, which they did not realize had changed owners. Either the families or the Bureau officials described the land as belonging to "Mr. Barnwell."⁷

Believing that excessive philanthropy would encourage indolence and immorality among formerly enslaved people, Freedman's Bureau officials quickly moved to end government relief programs while pushing freedmen and women to commit to one-year labor contracts. Historian Susan Eva O'Donovan explains the Bureau's philosophy, "Paid labor, particularly lengthy stints of contractual labor, held the key to former slaves' futures and their ability to become contributing members of civil, and perhaps political, life." While Bureau agents worked diligently to enforce the terms of these contracts, landowners who broke the agreements faced only civil suits, whereas freedmen and women faced harsh vagrancy laws designed to control and extract their labor. In an effort to subordinate the newly emancipated labor force and maintain white supremacy after the Civil War, the Florida legislature passed Black codes reminiscent of the statutes which had regulated the behavior of free and enslaved Black people in antebellum Florida. Vagrancy laws required formerly enslaved women and men to have proof of employment, i.e. a signed labor contract, or be subject to fines or imprisonment. When poor freedmen and women could not pay the fines, municipalities auctioned them off to planters and business owners who would profit off their unpaid labor for up to twelve months (Figure 9).⁸ Thus, landless freedmen and women were at the mercy of landowners with whom they were forced to enter into exploitative contracts they could not read.

⁷ Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 60–1.

⁸ O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 167; Joe M. Richardson, "The Freedmen's Bureau and Negro Labor in Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (Oct. 1960): 170; Joe M. Richardson, "Florida Black Codes," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (April 1969): 367–68, 371–72.

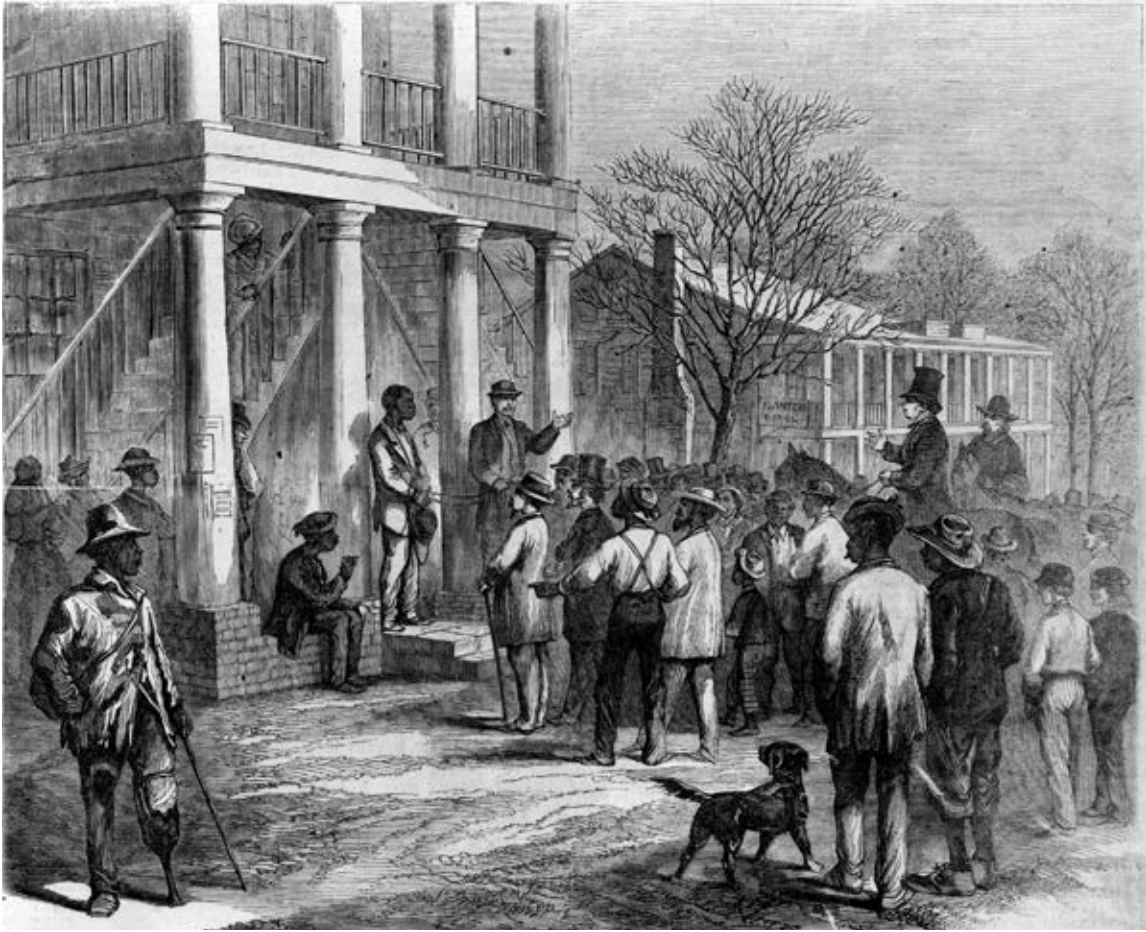


Figure 9. *Selling a freedman to pay his fine, at Monticello, Florida* from a sketch by James E. Taylor in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Jan. 19, 1867.

Library of Congress

Describing the sharecropping arrangement in paternalistic terms, Julia Dodge reported in *Scribner's Magazine* that when John F. Rollins settled on Fort George Island in 1869, he “supplied work, help and protection for the two or three scores of colored inhabitants.” When Rollins first visited Fort George in December 1868, he “found the colored man ([Andrew] Fielding) who took us over the plantation.” Satisfied with the land, he purchased the island with his partner, Richard Ayer, the following March. Even before purchasing the land, Rollins made plans for growing oranges and paid Fielding twenty dollars to plant cane on Fort George while he returned to New Hampshire. By the time Rollins settled on Fort George, the laborers were cultivating approximately one hundred acres of orange trees and planting sugar cane, corn, sweet potatoes, and oats.⁹

⁹ Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 61–2.

Hannah Rollins recalled that when she arrived at Fort George in the spring of 1869, nine African American families lived on the island (Figure 10). The freedmen and women fought to negotiate the terms of their labor and perhaps were able to use Rollins' lack of experience as a planter and his dependence on their expertise to their advantage. Like many landowners after Emancipation, Rollins "found it hard to manage the freed slaves." Hoping he would have better luck with immigrant laborers, he "imported some Swedes" sometime between 1869 and 1872 "but the venture was not a success as all they wanted was passage to America." In 1873, one northern visitor (W.G. Crosby) noted that Rollins gave the freedmen "a house, free of rent, as much ground as he chooses to cultivate for a garden, four pounds of pork, twelve of hominy, and a pint of salt, per week; or their equivalent in value in any other food they may prefer." Having negotiated more favorable rations, the freedmen and women "pay but little attention to their garden plots," according to Crosby.¹⁰

¹⁰ Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 62; O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 150.



Figure 10. Sharecropping family on Fort George Island, 1875, The New York Public Library.
<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e0-110e-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

The houses that Crosby said the sharecropping families enjoyed rent-free were the same tabby cabins Kingsley’s enslaved laborers had lived in. In 1877, Julia Dodge reported that “except a few still used, all [the cabins] are unroofed and in a state of greater or lesser ruin.” Bonify Napoleon’s great great great granddaughter, Evette Murrell, recalled that her grandmother, Minnie Dretha King Murrell, was a “slave up until she was aged 13” and lived

on the Kingsley Plantation “in those huts.” Minnie was born after 1865; the stories of Fort George Island she shared with her granddaughter made little distinction between life before and after Emancipation, as the conditions had changed little.¹¹

Minnie told her granddaughter that she had worked as a washerwoman and would “catch the boats up and down the river” to collect white patrons’ laundry and wash the clothes on the riverbank. Evette recalled, “They would go down there and wash the clothes near the rocks . . . they would use that to help clean the clothes, and then they would carry it back in big things on their heads.” Her grandmother “would take the boat and go and deliver the clothes after they had laundered them.” Laundry work enabled freedwomen to have more autonomy over their labor, bodies, and families. They worked as independent contractors, rather than servants or employees. Additionally, they could work in their own homes and avoid the sexual abuse they had previously endured at the hands of their former enslavers. Working from home also allowed women to balance their paid labor with their responsibilities to their families and to assert their roles as wives and mothers, which had been denied them during slavery.¹²

After Emancipation, freedwomen and men continued to maintain relationships with their former owners to protect their newfound freedom. Bonify Napoleon’s daughter, Esther, is listed in the 1870 and 1880 US Census as Easter Lottery. She later married George Bartley and is listed in the 1920 Census as Hester Bartley. Her great grandson, Isiah Williams, recalled visiting his grandmother in the mid-1970s. She told him “that one day she was working . . . out in Riverside selling berries with Easter Bartley, and a white gentlea man came up . . . and he talked a long time, and then when the man left, Easter Bartley told her that that was the man who had been my slavemaster.”¹³ Even as a free woman, she knew she would need to dissemble and exchange pleasantries with the man who had sold her down the river. Perhaps she felt a sense of defiance, showing him that she had survived his efforts to put her in his pocket and had managed through her own resourcefulness to return to her home and her community.

Bartley lived on the riverfront in Arlington with her daughter, Missy Adkins, and her son-in-law, Jim Adkins, until her death sometime after 1930. The only surviving image of Kingsley’s enslaved laborers is a photograph of Esther Bartley (aka “Aunt Easter”) in the collection of the Kingsley Plantation site on Fort George Island (Figure 11).¹⁴ It serves as a powerful testimony to the strength and resilience of the members of a community to

¹¹ Stowell, *Timucuan Historic Resource Study*, 74; Antoinette T. Jackson and Allan F. Burns, “Ethnohistorical Study of the Kingsley Plantation Community,” Department of Anthropology, University of Florida, 2006, 43.

¹² Jackson and Burns, “Ethnohistorical Study of the Kingsley Plantation Community,” 43; See Tera Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom*.

¹³ Jackson and Burns, “Ethnohistorical Study,” 47–9.

¹⁴ Jackson and Burns, “Ethnohistorical Study,” 40–2.

survive the trauma of bondage and separation with their spirits intact. In returning to Jacksonville and reuniting with loved ones, they boldly asserted their claim to the land which their labor had enriched and on which their families had been sold.



Figure 11. Esther Bartley, daughter of Bonafi and Mary Napoleon.
The back of the photo reads “Easter born at the Kingsley Plantation.”
Kingsley Plantation Files, National Park Service

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