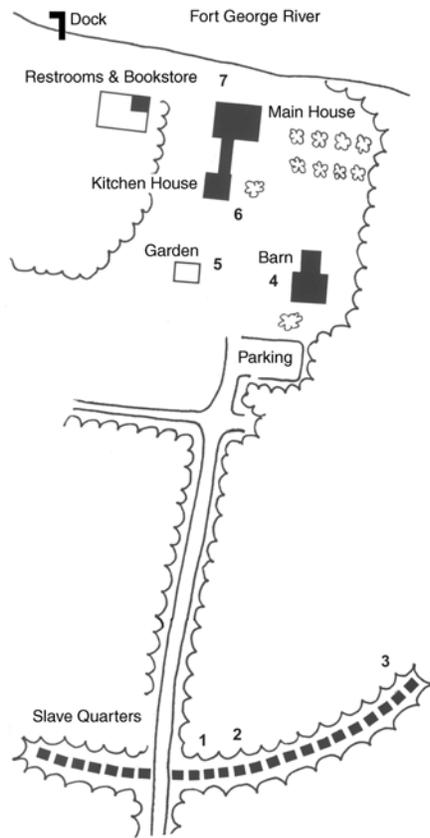




## Grounds Tour



### Where to Start...

During Florida's plantation period (1763-1865), Fort George Island was owned by many planters. The site name comes from one of those owners, Zephaniah Kingsley, who owned the plantation from 1814 to 1837.

This tour begins at the Slave Quarters. Thirty-two tabby cabins were home to the enslaved workforce. The remains of twenty-five cabins can be seen today.

It is hard to imagine that most this 1,000-acre island was used for growing crops during the plantation period. Agricultural use ended around 1900 and since then the fields have reverted back to forest.

Kingsley Plantation represents a tumultuous time and place in Florida's past. The ever-changing political, social, and economic climate greatly affected the lives of both free and slave. Failed crops could bankrupt the owner, which often resulted in slave families being sold apart. Despite the harsh conditions of bondage, slaves not only persevered, but developed a richly diverse culture. The lives of the owners and slaves were closely intertwined.

**Look for signposts or outdoor exhibits on the grounds with numbers that correspond to the map.**

### Protecting America's Special Places

Before you begin your tour, please remember that all resources, natural and cultural, are protected in National Park areas. This means all plants, animals, historic structures and objects must be left as you find them. The tabby structures at the slave quarters are very fragile. During your visit you will see deliberate abuse, called vandalism, but visitors also cause damage unintentionally. Help us preserve these historic buildings for future generations.

- Please do not climb on any part of the buildings or touch the tabby walls. There is a piece of tabby for you to touch next to the restored cabin.
- Any objects found might have historic significance to the site, so please leave them where you find them and notify a ranger.
- You can also help protect our national treasures by reporting damaging acts to a ranger in the visitor center or by calling (904) 251-3537.

### Stop 1: Slave Quarters

Many slaves worked in the fields, which were located along the dirt road leading into the slave quarters. The main cash crop here was Sea Island cotton. Other crops included sugar cane, corn, beans, and potatoes.

On this Sea Island plantation, slaves were assigned according to the task system. A task was a specific amount of work required for each slave to finish daily.

While many slaves worked in the fields, other daily tasks included house work or skilled tasks such as carpentry or blacksmithing.

When the task was finished, slaves used whatever remained of the day to hunt, fish, garden, or tend to other personal needs.

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**Stop 2:  
Restored Cabin**

These structures were built with a material called tabby. Oyster shells, one of the main ingredients, were piled into middens by the Timucua and their ancestors. When planters and slaves first arrived, these shell middens provided abundant building material. Skilled slaves burned the shells to make lime, which was mixed with sand and water. This “concrete” was poured into forms, layer by layer, to make the walls.

The slave quarters were the homes for 60 to 80 enslaved families. Each home had a fireplace and “kitchen,” where slaves prepared their nightly meals, as well as a room for sleeping.

Slaves might have received cornmeal, molasses, salt and other basic provisions from the plantation owner, but had to grow or gather the rest of their food and supplies on a plot of land provided to them. Enslaved families often chose to grow the food of their African cultures. Yams, okra, blackeyed peas, eggplant, and sesame are a few examples.

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**Stop 3:  
East End of Slave  
Quarters**

The slave quarters at Kingsley Plantation are laid out in a unique way. Instead of a straight line, the houses form a semi-circle. This pattern is similar to village design in some areas of West Africa.

Notice that the buildings are not all the same size. The larger ones, at the ends of each row, were given to the Driver and his family for the extra responsibility of managing the daily work assignments and reporting to the owner. The larger

cabins were also shared for community activities such as cooking, or were given to slave craftsmen as a show of status.

Before continuing to Stop 4, take a moment and look in the direction of the plantation house. During the plantation period this now wooded area would have been an open field, with a clear view of the other plantation buildings.

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**Stop 4:  
Barn**

Like the slave quarters, the walls of the barn are made of tabby. This barn had multiple uses such as storage, housing for animals, a work place for slaves, or even living quarters. The oldest part of the barn is the north end, which is made out of tabby brick.

Horses, mules, and oxen pulled plows and wagons, and provided power to operate mills. Cows, pigs and chickens were raised for food. Buildings that are no longer here included workshops for blacksmiths, carpenters, and other skilled craftsmen. There were also saw and sugar mills.

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**Stop 5:  
Garden**

During the spring, summer and fall the garden provides a first hand look at plantation period cash crops such as Sea Island cotton, indigo, and sugar cane, and daily food crops like peanuts, peas, pumpkins, potatoes, and okra.

By the 1790s, Sea Island cotton was the main cash crop. This cotton grew best on the islands along the coast of South Carolina, Georgia, and north Florida. Its strong fibers are long and silky, which make it very valuable.

The cotton plants grow as high as seven feet, and the blooms are at all levels of the

plant. The cotton was picked daily from late July to December. Slaves also were given the tasks of removing the seeds by hand and packing bales for shipment to market. During the peak of the cotton harvest (October), a task could last all day.

The four marked posts between the garden area and the kitchen house lay out a  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre. Plantation tasks (see Stop 1) for field workers were measured in increments of the  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre.

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**Stop 6:  
Kitchen**

Cooking for the plantation owner and his family was done in a separate building because of heat, noise, smells, and the danger of a fire.

The kitchen was a meeting point between African and European cultures. Slave cooks prepared foods traditionally, altering recipes passed down from African ancestors and mixing in local ingredients

and new recipes from the owner's family.

After slave cooks prepared meals they carried them to the owner's house to be served. Water was brought from the well or the cistern near this building. The latticed walkway was added in the 1870s.

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**Stop 7:  
Waterfront and  
Owner's Home**

The front of the plantation owner's house faces the Fort George River. Most plantations were located along waterways because transportation by ship or boat was the easiest way to get crops to market or to bring in supplies.

The plantation house dates to 1798 and is the oldest plantation house still standing in the state of Florida. It was built for comfort, with four corner rooms and the

central two-story section. The stairs to the second floor were located outside on the back porch. The house was designed so that windows on all sides of the rooms would allow breezes to cross-ventilate. Unusual features of the house include the full cellar and the widow's walk on top of the house.

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**Kingsley Family**

Zephaniah Kingsley relocated to Spanish Florida in 1803 and became a successful merchant and planter. His African wife, Anta Madgine Jai, was from Senegal. Kingsley purchased her as a slave in Havana, Cuba in 1806. He freed Anna (as she became known) and their children in 1811. In 1814 he moved his family to Fort George Island. Anna took advantage of Spanish views on race and society, which enabled her to own her own plantation and slaves. She also was her husband's business partner.

When Spain lost control of Florida in 1821, legislators in the new United States Territory quickly enacted laws that greatly reduced the civil liberties of free blacks, such as Kingsley's family members. Kingsley addressed Florida's Legislative Council and wrote numerous pamphlets on the importance of maintaining a free black population in Florida.

His campaign to keep a system of society where people were judged by class, and not by color, was largely ignored. By 1832 the harsh laws restricting the rights of all "persons of color" became intolerable. Faced with the reality of his family losing their freedom upon his death, he began looking for a country where they could live without restrictions.

By 1837, Kingsley moved Anna, their two sons, and 50 of his now freed slaves to Haiti, a free black republic. Their two daughters remained in Jacksonville, married to wealthy white men. Zephaniah Kingsley died in 1843 knowing that his family was secure.

The Kingsley story is a window into a period of sweeping change in Florida's history. The new territorial laws forced free and enslaved people to adapt to reforms in which some gained, but many lost, personal liberties.

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*"Few, I think will deny that color and condition, if properly considered, are two very separate qualities... our legislators... have mistaken the shadow for the substance, and confounded together two very different things; thereby substantiating by law a dangerous and inconvenient antipathy, which can have no better foundation than prejudice."*

Zephaniah Kingsley,  
*A Treatise on...Slavery*, 1829

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