

Plantation Agriculture in the Middle Suwannee Basin of Florida, 1825-1850*

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INTRODUCTION

One day in 1851, Stephen Foster went to the office of his brother, Morrison Foster, in Pittsburgh and asked him to suggest the name of a southern river with a musical sound. His brother suggested Yazoo and Pee Dee and then they consulted a map of the United States. When they saw Suwannee, Stephen immediately crossed out Pee Dee and substituted Suwannee, which he purposely misspelled by omitting the "U" and one "N." Foster hardly knew or cared that his accidental selection of the name, "Swanee" for "Old Folks at Home" was quite appropriate and timely; for the Middle Suwannee River area was on the frontier of southern cotton culture at that very time.¹ Today Floridians who have read

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¹A letter dated January 26, 1956, addressed to the Stephen Foster Memorial at White Springs, Florida, and written by Evelyn Foster Mornewick of Stuart, Florida, daughter of Morrison Foster confirmed that her father and Stephen Foster had selected "Suwannee" from an Atlas.

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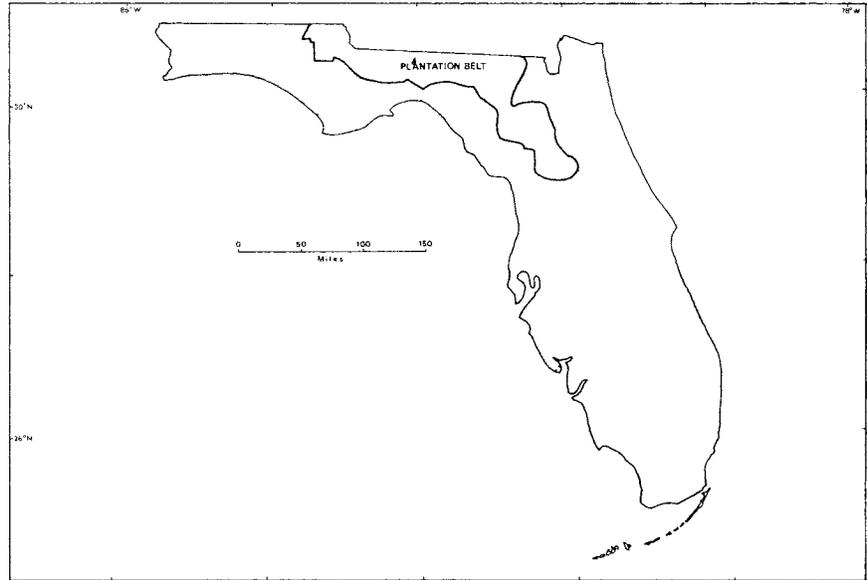


Fig. 1. Plantation belt, Florida, 1850, from Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Plantation in Antebellum Florida 1821-1850*, 1973.

their history know that this part of Florida had a flourishing antebellum plantation economy based on cotton. However, much less attention has been given to the agricultural history of the Middle Suwannee Basin than to the plantation economy of the panhandle part of Florida (Paisley, 1968; Smith, 1964; Appleyard, 1940; and Phillips and Glunt, 1927).

Julia Smith in her book entitled "Slavery and Plantation Growth in Antebellum Florida, 1821-1860" (Smith, 1973) delineates the plantation belt of north central Florida as shown in Figure 1. This delineation includes the Suwannee Basin along with the much more widely recognized plantation area of the eastern part of the Florida panhandle. During the period 1825-1850 the Suwannee Basin was included in four counties: Madison, Hamilton, Columbia, and Alachua (Fig. 2). These counties of course did not have the same boundaries in 1840 that now exist.

In order to understand plantation agriculture as it existed in the Middle Suwannee Basin between 1825 and 1850, several historical

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Fig. 2. Counties of the Middle Suwannee Basin, Florida, 1840 as shown on a map of counties of the United States in 1840 published by the former Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and compiled from maps of the U.S. Geological Survey and other information from the Bureau of the Census.

circumstances must be noted. The treaty with Spain was signed in 1819 but was not ratified by Spain until 1821. Under provisions of that Treaty, Florida was ceded to the United States. Since the United States had agreed to pay 5 million dollars to American citizens who had claims against Spain, there was a strong desire to start selling the newly acquired public domain land as soon as possible. Therefore, a General Land Office was opened in Tallahassee, the territorial capital, in the mid-1820's. The first land sale from the public domain in the Middle Suwannee Basin was made in 1827 to John Bellamy. Sales accelerated rapidly following this first purchase, the record of which is available at the Bureau of State Lands, General Land Office, State of Florida Tract Book, v. 11, p. 191.

Remoteness and the fact that the Seminole War did not end until 1842 also dictated the spread of settlement to some extent. Although the main action of that time was south and east of the Suwannee Basin, the Seminole War was to some extent a deterrent to the rapid

spread of settlement, particularly into the southeastern part of the basin. Also it should be noted that Florida did not become a state until 1845 and that a frontier situation existed in the Middle Suwannee Basin during the 1830's and 1840's (Smith, 1973, p. 9-27).

In undertaking this study, the author had three main objectives in mind. In the first place, the author wanted to determine if different documentary sources of data could be used to enhance the geographical analysis and understanding of the settlement process on a part of the southern frontier where the plantation system was being established. Secondly, the author wanted to evaluate the usefulness of modern mapping of soils and land use/land cover in comprehending and reconstructing apparent reasons for early settlement patterns and processes. Thirdly, the author wanted to contribute to a better appreciation of the southern movement of settlement which has been given much less attention in American history than the westward movement of settlement.

The major documentary sources used in the study were records of the General Land Office of Tallahassee currently available from the Bureau of State Lands of the Department of Natural Resources of the State of Florida and in the Records Center of the National Archives in Suitland, Maryland. These records document the land sales to individuals from the public domain. They give the name of the purchaser, date of sale, area purchased, and location of purchase by township, range, section, etc. Original land survey maps and notes prepared by the surveyors contain valuable information about the natural or pre-settlement characteristics of the land (Fig. 3).

The manuscript censuses containing original enumeration schedules for each household for the Censuses of Population of 1830, 1840, and 1850 were a second major documentary source. The schedules for 1830 and 1840 list the name of the head of household and names of white, slave, and free colored members of the household by age and the occupation of the head of household. The 1850 schedule lists by name all white members of a household and the last place at which the head of household lived before moving to his present address. A separate schedule was used for slaves, and these were enumerated by head of household.

Individual schedules or returns from the Censuses of Agriculture for 1840 and 1850 were the third major source. The first Census of

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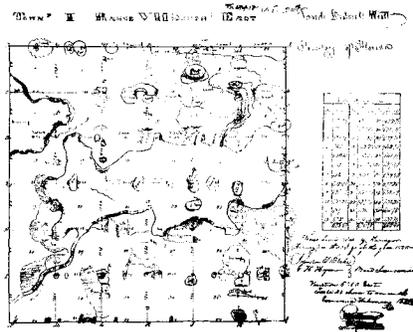


Fig. 3. Copy of an original plat map, Township I and Range VII, South and East, Territory of Florida, 1862.

Agriculture for the United States was taken in 1840. A sample completed copy of the forms used for compiling the data from these sources indicates the kind of data available from each source (Fig. 4). No acreage data were gathered in the Censuses of Agriculture for 1840 and 1850 except the acreage of improved and unimproved land in farms.

Two other documentary sources were *not* used. These were the county tax records which contained information on land owned and number and worth of slaves owned. The earliest available tax records within the Middle Suwannee Basin were for Madison County, but no tax records exist for that county prior to 1859. Probate records available at the county seats also were not used.

THE PEOPLE

The total population of the Florida Territory in 1821 was about 20,000, mainly concentrated near St. Augustine and Pensacola, which had been centers of early Spanish settlement (Smith, 1973 p. 16). When Madison County was created in 1826, there probably were about 250 people in the entire area, including slaves. Madison County at that time included the present territory of Taylor, Lafayette and Dixie counties. The Census of 1830 recorded 525 persons in the same area. (Cash, 1938, p. 850).

As shown in Table 1, the population of the Middle Suwannee Basin increased rapidly between 1830 and 1850. However, Leon and Jeffer-

PLANTATION STUDY DATA SHEET

County Madison Population
 Date of Census: 1850 Agricultural census
 Land purchase

Name of Landowner: McGehee, John C No. of Whites 2
 Birth Place: South Carolina No. of Slaves 67

Acres: Improved 600 Cash value of farm: 25,000
 Unimproved 1850 Cash value of implements and machinery 2,000

Livestock:		No.	Produce con't.		unit	amount
horses . . .		3	sweet potatoes .	bu.	400	
asses & mules		12	barley . . .	bu.	0	
milk cows . .		16	buckwheat . .	bu.	0	
working oxen .		6	value of orchard prod. \$.		0	
other cattle		50	wine	gal.	0	
sheep		95	value of prod. of mkt. \$ garden		0	
swine		350	butter	lb.	2,000	
Value of livestock \$		3,000	cheese	lb.	0	
			hay	tons	6	

Produce:		unit	amount	Produce con't.		unit	amount
wheat		bu.	20	clover seed . . .	bu.	0	
rye		bu.	20	Other grass seed	bu.	0	
corn		bu.	4,000	hops	lb.	0	
rice		bu.	1,000	hemp	tons	0	
tobacco . . .		lb.	0	flax	lb.	0	
oats		bu.	600	flaxseed	bu.	0	
ginned cotton	400 lb. ba.		200	silk cocoon . . .	lb.	0	
wool		lb.	600	maple sugar . . .	lb.	0	
peas and beans		bu.	0	cane sugar	hhds. of 1000 lbs	4	
Irish potatoes		bu.	10	molasses	gal.	1,200	
				beeswax and honey	lb.	0	

Value of animals slaughtered \$ 1,000 Value of homemade manufacture \$ 0

Fig. 4. Plantation study data sheet.

son counties to the west had a total of more than 16,000 in 1840, nearly twice as many people as the counties of the Middle Suwannee Basin. During the 1840's, population nearly doubled in the Middle

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Suwannee Basin while Leon and Jefferson Counties had an increase of only about 3,000 people or a total of about 19,000 in 1850. (Census of Population, 1850).

Whites outnumbered blacks by more than 2 to 1 in 1840 and nearly 2 to 1 in 1850. These ratios are in marked contrast to the ratios for Leon and Jefferson Counties where blacks outnumbered whites by more than 2 to 1 in 1850. From these contrasting ratios it is obvious that plantation agriculture was much more dominant in Leon and Jefferson Counties than in the Middle Suwannee Basin during the period from 1825 to 1850. Of the 368 persons who purchased land from the public domain between 1825 and 1850 in the Middle Suwannee Basin, 201 owned slaves and 167 did not have any slaves. (From census returns of individual households.) The average number of slaves owned by purchasers of land from the public domain was 16. The average size of household for slaveowners and non-slaveowners was nearly identical, totaling 6.4 and 6.3 respectively.

TABLE 1. Population of the Middle Suwannee Basin, 1840 and 1850.

County	1840			Number of Families	1850		
	White	Slave	Total		White	Slave	Total ¹
Madison	1,442	1,202	2,644	498	2,802	2,688	5,490
Hamilton	1,034	427	1,461	302	1,817	685	2,511
Columbia	1,652	450	2,102	569	3,541	1,266	4,808
Alachua	1,720	562	2,282	274	1,617	906	2,524
Total	5,848	2,641	8,489	1,643	9,777	5,545	15,333

¹Includes free colored.

The census of 1850 contained a question on place of birth. Answers to this question give a good indication of the origin of the population which settled the Middle Suwannee Basin during the period 1825 and 1850. Of the 203 purchasers of land from the public domain who responded to this particular question, 102 gave Georgia as their place of birth. South Carolina was the source state for 50 families, followed by North Carolina with 27. Only 12 families originated in Florida. Another 12 families came from New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Massachusetts, Ireland, England, and Scotland (Table 2).

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TABLE 2. Birthplace of persons purchasing land from the public domain in the Middle Suwannee Basin of Florida between 1825 and 1850.

State or Country of Origin of Heads of Households	Number
Georgia	102
South Carolina	50
North Carolina	27
Florida	12
New York	4
Pennsylvania	2
Virginia	1
Massachusetts	1
Ireland	2
England	1
Scotland	<u>1</u>
Total	203

PATTERNS OF LAND PURCHASES

The period from 1825 to 1850 was the boom period of land sales in the Middle Suwannee Basin. Sales from the public domain were particularly strong between 1830 and 1837. By 1830 a few purchases were being made for the first time in the western part of Madison County. The banking crisis of 1837 slowed land sales, and in the 1840's the amount of land sold from the public domain was well below the level of the 1830's. However, the number of purchases was higher than during the 1830's (Table 3).

TABLE 3. Number of persons purchasing land from the public domain of the Middle Suwannee Basin between 1825 and 1850 by decade of purchase.*

Number of purchases	Number
Before 1830	2
1830-39	118
1840-49	<u>192</u>
Total	312

*Does not include those enumerated only in the census of population either in 1840 or 1850.

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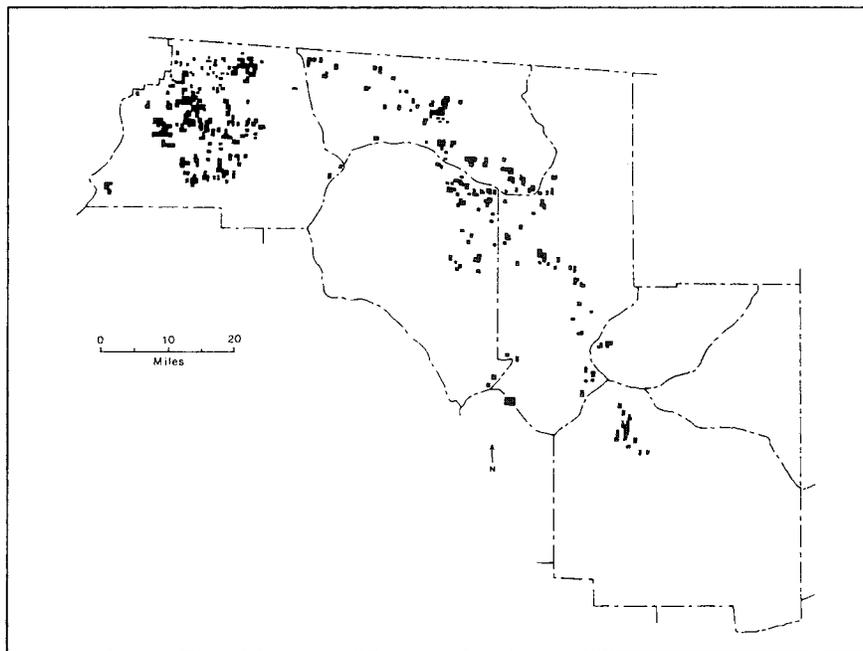


Fig. 5. Lands purchased by slaveowners in the Middle Suwannee Basin, 1831-1840.

John Bellamy, who had contracted from the Territorial Government to build a road through the Middle Suwannee Basin, purchased two tracts of 160 and 320 acres in Madison County in 1827. This was the first purchase made by anyone from whom information from the Census of Population, Census of Agriculture (not known by that name at that time), and the General Land Office was obtainable. Undoubtedly this road, later known as the Bellamy Road, though unimproved and rough, was an important factor in the early settlement of parts of the Middle Suwannee Basin.

The 312 purchasers of land from the public domain for whom census information was available, bought 96,424 acres at \$1.25 an acre (Table 4). Twice as much land was purchased in the 1830's as was purchased in the 1840's. Those owning slaves bought 77 percent of all the land purchased by those for whom census data were available.

The distributions of lands purchased by slaveowners and non-slaveowners in the Suwannee Basin between 1831 and 1840 are shown in Figures 5 and 6. Purchases made by slaveowners predom-

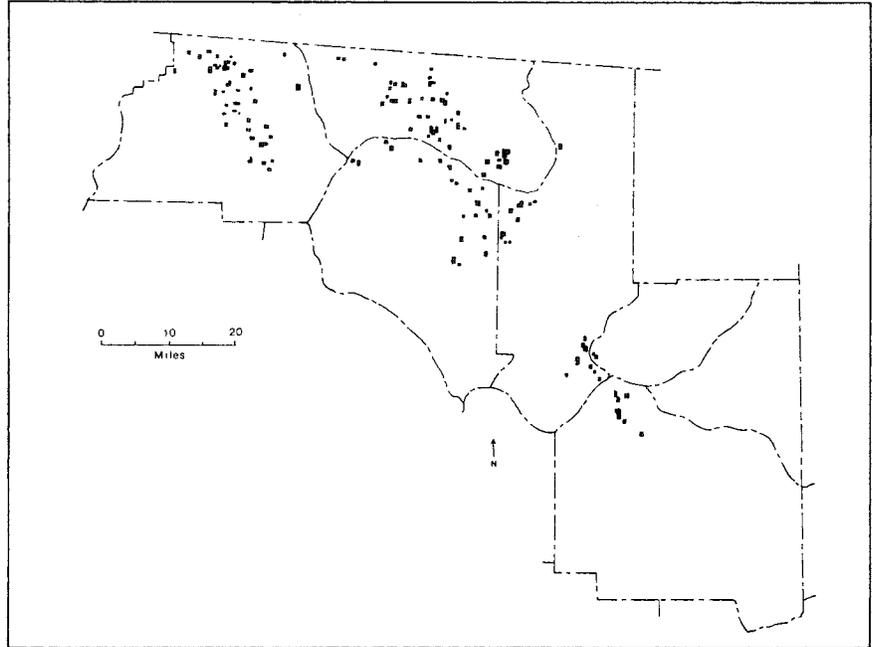


Fig. 6. Lands purchased by non-slaveowners in the Middle Suwannee Basin, 1831-1840.

inate in the western part of the region mainly because some of the plantations owners already established in Jefferson County were extending their holdings into the relatively unsettled western part of the Basin. The alignment of early land purchases coincides closely with areas of well-drained soils and nearly complete avoidance of poorly drained areas except for the selection of some wetland areas for producing sugarcane.

TABLE 4. Acreage purchased from the public domain between 1825 and 1850 in the Middle Suwannee Basin by slaveowners and non-slaveowners.

	Total Area purchased (acres)	By Slave- owners (acres)	By Non-Slave- owners (acres)
Before 1830	2,464	2,464	0
1830-39	62,095	50,006	12,089
1840-49	31,865	21,244	10,621
Total	96,424	73,714	22,710

Before 1841 those who settled on the land prior to purchase were not protected if someone else purchased the land they had settled and had begun to clear for agriculture. The Preemption Act of 1841 was passed to protect such squatters and to encourage settlement in frontier areas. This Act gave such squatters the first chance to purchase the land on which they had settled provided they exercised the right within a given period of time. No information is available from the records of the General Land Office as to how many purchasers were squatters.

Of course, land was obtained by the early settlers by means other than direct purchase from the public domain. Many who purchased land from the General Land Office in Tallahassee often did so with the intention of reselling some of it later at much higher prices. By 1835 some speculators were asking as much as \$10 an acre for land that was bought for \$1.25 an acre from the General Land Office (Gray, 1933, v. II, p. 633). Grants of land from the Territorial Government were also made to private individuals. For example, John Bellamy was given a grant of 3,000 acres east of Monticello along the Aucilla River as partial payment for building the Bellamy Road (Smith, 1964, p. 2223). In Alachua County, Spanish land grants made prior to 1819 were also part of the original pattern of land acquisition. For example, the author's home in Gainesville is situated on a grant of land made to Don Fernando de la Maza Arredondo and Son, on December 22, 1817, for colonization purposes.

A comparison of the total acreage of land purchased directly from the public domain as of 1850 and the acreage of improved and unimproved land reported in Census of Agriculture for 1850 indicates that only approximately half of the total land in farms as of that date had been purchased directly from the public domain in the Middle Suwannee Basin (Table 5). Land grants either made by the Spanish prior to 1819 or grants made by the Territorial Government to individuals or to companies as inducements for road and railroad construction, drainage projects, and other public improvements were a prominent aspect in the transfer of land from public to private ownership during the early settlement period of the Middle Suwannee Basin.

From an analysis of the documents available from the General Land Office, several important conclusions can be made about the

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patterns of land purchase. In the first place, not only were the owners of slaves the dominant purchasers of land, but the 51 owners of 10 or more slaves bought 57 percent of the land purchased by slaveowners, while the 202 owners of less than 10 slaves per owner purchased only 43 percent of the land purchased by slaveowners. Large land holdings and the ownership of 25 or more slaves were essential elements for establishing a plantation on the frontier in the Middle Suwannee Basin.

TABLE 5. Improved and unimproved land in the Middle Suwannee Basin, 1850.

County	Improved (acres)	Unimproved (acres)	Total (acres)
Madison	25,580	42,955	68,535
Hamilton	10,733	16,251	26,984
Columbia	18,467	28,012	46,479
Alachua	9,270	46,234	56,504
Totals	64,050	133,452	198,502

For the most part, the acreage purchased by individuals directly from the public domain was not large. Of the 252 persons for whom data from both the Census of Population and the Census of Agriculture were available, only 11 persons purchased a total of 1,000 or more acres from the General Land Office during the period from 1825 to 1850. Another 12 purchased between 500 and 999 acres. Those purchasing less than 100 acres and from 100 to 499 acres were 116 and 113 respectively.

Another important conclusion that can be drawn from analysis of the records of land purchase is the fact that many purchasers of land bought their land in two or more purchases made in different years. Of the 312 purchasers for whom records were analyzed, 43 percent purchased land at least in two different years. Those who purchased large acreages generally did so over a period of five years or more. This pattern of extended purchase over time is illustrated by the purchase record of John Bellamy. His first purchase of record was made in 1827 and his last purchase was made in 1838 (Fig. 7).

To those who have studied plantation agriculture historically rather

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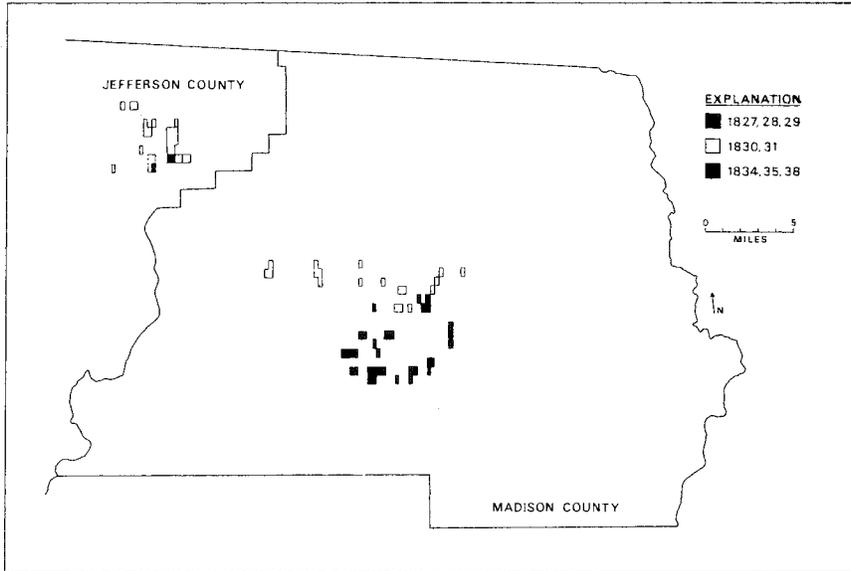


Fig. 7. Lands purchased by John Bellamy, 1827-1838.

than geographically, another conclusion that is evident from mapping the purchases of land made by plantation owners is the lack of adjacency of the landholdings assembled as a plantation unit. Plantations in the Middle Suwannee Basin were not comprised of contiguous landholdings. Generally there was a core tract of 400 or 500 acres with which several additional separated tracts were associated. The land selection process certainly played a role in creating this pattern of ownership. Land unsuitable for cotton culture was generally passed by in the early period of settlement. Another factor accounting for the pattern undoubtedly was the fact that if the developer of a plantation was acquiring his land over a period of several years, others would also be making purchases of land in the same area, thus preventing a plantation being comprised of contiguous land. Some trading of land also probably took place during the settlement period. Evidence of such trading would have to be traced in the probate records of the various counties.

By comparing the plantation belt of Middle Florida as delineated by Smith (Fig. 1) with the distribution of lands purchased by slave-owners (Fig. 3) and the distribution of those owning 10 or more slaves

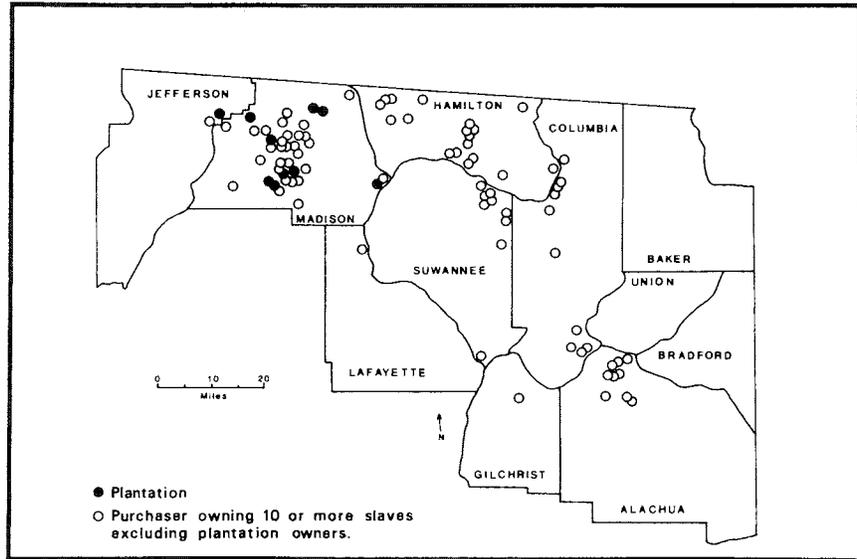


Fig. 8. Purchasers of public domain lands owning 10 or more slaves in the Middle Suwannee Basin, 1825-1850.

(Fig. 8), it is quite obvious that the capability to associate demographic and economic data obtained from census sources with the actual tracts of land being used for agricultural production permits a much more definitive spatial analysis of plantation agriculture in the Middle Suwannee Basin than is possible by use of census sources alone. In the early frontier period, cotton culture was restricted for the most part to a much smaller area than some historians have shown. This refinement in locating the actual units producing cotton also permits much more effective use of modern soil surveys and maps showing present-day land use and land cover patterns in the analysis of frontier agricultural conditions.

PLANTATION AGRICULTURE

Lewis C. Gray in his *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* defines the southern plantation of that period in American history as “a capitalistic type of organization in which a considerable number of unfree laborers were employed under unified direction and control in the production of a staple crop” (Gray, 1933,

p. 444). Often overlooked is the fact that plantations of the antebellum period varied greatly in size and complexity. The planter aristocracy of the Old South has been highly publicized. Much less attention has been paid to middle-sized and small-scale plantations that also existed. None of the plantations operating in the Middle Suwannee Basin during the 1830's and 1840's really qualified to be among Gray's elite group with hundreds of slaves, extended periods of owner absenteeism and high volume production of cotton, which was the staple crop in that part of Florida (Gray, 1933, p. 492, 497, and 498). Further east and south of the Cotton plantation region, sugar plantations were also common prior to 1850.

After analyzing census returns for 1850, Smith concludes that there were "almost a thousand cotton plantations in Florida" at that time. She also points out "that most of these were small. Only 200 plantations were large enough to use 30 slaves or more, and some of these used more than 100. A few used more than 200" (Smith, 1973, p. 27). In her doctoral dissertation Smith also states that "of the well established plantations throughout the plantation belt in Middle Florida, the average size appears to have been from fifteen hundred to twenty-five hundred acres. The largest and most productive plantations were located in Leon and Jefferson Counties" (Smith, 1964, p. 45).

Using returns obtained from persons enumerated in the censuses of 1840 and 1850 along with records of lands purchased by individuals from the General Land Office in Tallahassee, a more definitive grouping of units of agricultural production is possible. Five elements of an agricultural unit were considered especially important in identifying plantations and semi-plantations. There were:

1. Number of slaves owned
2. Bales of cotton produced
3. Acreage of improved land
4. Acreage of unimproved land
5. Total acreage purchased from the public domain as of 1850.

Other elements useful in understanding the characteristics of plantations, semi-plantations, and other agricultural units of the Middle Suwannee Basin were:

1. Number of horses, mules, and working oxen.
2. Number of cattle other than milk cows and working oxen.
3. Number of swine.

4. Bushels of corn and rice produced.
5. Gallons of molasses that were made from sugarcane.

After analyzing the individual census returns for 1840 and 1850 and records of land purchases made between 1825 and 1850 by 71 persons owning 10 or more slaves as of 1850, it was possible to identify 10 agricultural units that clearly qualified as plantations. The other 61 units having 10 or more slaves have been referred to as semi-plantations. A semi-plantation, as analyzed in this study, corresponds in general to Gray's "middle-sized" plantations. All of the major plantations were located in Madison County with major parts of two of the plantations situated in eastern Jefferson County. These 10 units were far ahead of the next several units when arrayed in a rank size ordering based on each of the essential five elements listed above. A few inconsistencies exist. For example, John Bellamy produced very little cotton and had very little improved and unimproved land reported in relation to the large acreage purchased and the number of slaves owned. Failure to find a census return for Bellamy complicates the analysis of his plantation. The main elements of the 10 plantations are presented in Table 6. An averaging of these essential elements along with the supplemental elements used in characterizing agricultural units in the Middle Suwannee Basin is presented in Table 7.

In analyzing Table 8, one finds that the amount of cotton produced per slave is markedly lower on the semi-plantations than on the 10 plantations. Two bales of cotton per slave was produced on the plantations while less than a bale per slave was produced on the semi-plantation. However, a very marked spread in productivity existed among the 61 agricultural units having 10 or more slaves. The 10 plantations were all well established at the time the 1850 census was taken. On the other hand, several of the semi-plantations had been established only a relatively short time prior to 1850.

From Table 8, another interesting comparison can be made. The total acreage purchased directly from the public domain by the 10 plantation owners is quite consistent with the total acreage of improved and unimproved land reported by these owners in the censuses of 1840 and 1850. In contrast, the average acreage of improved and unimproved land reported by the 61 semi-plantation owners is approximately twice the acreage purchased directly from the General Land Office. The main explanation for this contrast is

TABLE 6. Essential characteristics of the major plantations of the Middle Suwannee Basin, 1850

Plantation owners	Slaves (number)		Bales of Cotton Produced		Total Acreage Purchased as of		Improved Acreage		Unimproved Acreage	
	1840	1850	1840	1850	1840	1850	1840	1850	1840	1850
Bailey, William J.	57		150		560	2,721	1,250		3,510	
Bellamy, John	100		24		6,300	6,300	100		220	
Church, Lucius	35		200		1,400	2,160	600		1,600	
Lipscomb, John	68	115	—	—	160	1,394		1,350		3,630
Hankins, Dennis	36	38		100	2,682	3,025		450		790
Linton, Thomas J.	64	101		250	2,930	3,529		690		2,690
McGehee, John C.		67		200	1,117	1,794		600		1,850
Mays, Rhydon G.		103		240	80	159		750		1,050
Mays, Richard J.	61	80		200	3,440	4,280		700		230
Parramore, Reddin W.		116		260		416		1,400		3,000

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TABLE 7. Selected characteristics of units of agricultural production in the Middle Suwannee Basin, 1850, averages per unit

	Unit	Plantations	Land purchasers ¹ other than plantations having 10 or more slaves	Land purchasers ¹ having less than 10 slaves	Land purchasers ¹ having no slaves
Slaves	Number	81	25	4	0
Bales of cotton produced	Number	162	16	3	2
Total acreage purchased from public domain	Acres	2,578	281	143	117
Improved land	Acres	834	174	65	37
Unimproved land	Acres	1,857	394	157	74
Horses	Number	5	4	3	2
Mules	Number	14	3	1	0 ²
Working oxen	Number	6	2	1	0 ²
Cattle (other than oxen and milk cows)	Number	400	86	56	42
Swine	Number	238	84	58	41
Corn	Bushels	3,350	903	361	227
Rice	Bushels	1,065	379	200	117
Molasses	Gallons	953	106	33	47

Fig. 1. Areas of tidal rice cultivation: Georgetown County, South Carolina.

¹From the public domain.²Less than 0.5.

probably the fact that many of the later arriving semi-plantation owners had to purchase land at prices considerably above \$1.25 per acre to obtain land well suited to cotton production.

By looking more closely at some of the characteristics of plantations and semi-plantations, some additional insights into agricultural activities in the Middle Suwannee Basin may be obtained. The number and kind of work stock vary widely among plantations and semi-plantations. For example, John Lipscomb reported 7 horses, 26 mules and 10 working oxen in the census of 1850 while Reddin W. Parramore reported only 2 horses, no mules, and 2 working oxen. Most of the plantation owners had all three types of work stock. Corn was produced on nearly all plantations and semi-plantations. Many of these units, however, had no rice production. Molasses were widely produced from sugarcane. Swine were produced on nearly all plantations and semi-plantations. Large numbers of cattle were grazed on many of the plantations and semi-plantations.

Turning from the data primarily from census sources, an analysis of the information obtained from the General Land Office gives a better understanding of the distribution of the plantations. As stated elsewhere, none of the plantations were comprised of a single contiguous tract of land. Some of the plantation landholdings were much more dispersed than others. This was particularly true for the lands owned by John Bellamy, Richard J. Mays, William J. Bailey, John McGehee, and John Lipscomb. In contrast, the plantation owned by Lucius Church consisted of a single cluster of land in the vicinity of Cherry Lake. Dennis Hankins really had two separate plantations, one near Cherry Lake and the other located southwest of Madison, The Linton plantation located mainly to the east of Greenville was also a relatively compact holding. Redden Parramore and Rhydon Mays purchased very little land directly from the General Land Office; however census records indicate that they had large acreages of improved and unimproved land, which probably had been purchased from another landowner rather than from the public domain (Table 6).

INFLUENCES ON THE LAND SELECTION PROCESS

The use of demographic and economic data from the census along with information on land purchases obtained from General Land Office records permits an examination of the land selection process.

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Unfortunately the lack of published soil surveys for most of the Middle Suwannee Basin hampers a detailed analysis. However, a study of the distribution of early land purchases with the soil patterns shown on a generalized soil survey for the State clearly indicates that early purchases were made predominantly in the upland areas with well-drained to moderately well-drained soils (General Soil Map, 1962). Sandy loams of the Norfolk and Orangeburg series found in western Madison County were purchased early. The loamy sands of the Arrendondo and Gainesville series were also in strong demand for cotton culture. A close association exists between the location of plantations and semi-plantations and the distribution of these soil series. Wetlands were much avoided throughout the frontier period of the Middle Suwannee Basin except for use in sugarcane production. Undoubtedly settlers were generally very selective in the early years of settlement. Later as the lands best suited to cotton production were already in use, other lands with less desirable soils were purchased.

Of course purchasers relied heavily on vegetative cover as an indicator of land quality. Smith summarizes from DeBow's Compendium of the Seventh Census as follows:

“Hammocks, savannas, and pine flats characterize the plantation belt in Middle Florida. The lands most sought after by early planters were the high hammock lands. When these lands were cleared and cultivated, they made excellent crops. Usually a heavy growth of trees, such as magnolias, oaks, and laurels, were to be found on the high hammocks. The low hammocks, though less desirable for cotton culture unless properly drained, were preferred for planting sugarcane” (Smith 1964, p. 10).

Although soil conditions were the major influence on the early selections of lands suitable for cotton production, other influences also were present. Prior rudimentary cultivation of lands by native Indians made land clearing easier and hence such lands were often purchased early (Appleyard, 1940, p. 29). The Bellamy Road also was an influence as previously noted. Some who settled on the land prior to purchase had the advantage of a head start (Smith, 1964, p. 27).

PRESENT AND PAST LAND USE PATTERNS

As one travels through parts of the South where antebellum plantation agriculture was a major component in the agricultural scene of that period, it is very obvious that major changes in land use patterns have occurred. In the Georgia Piedmont, for example, much land that was used for crops prior to 1860 is now forested or in pasture. In the Black Belt of Alabama and Mississippi, pasture has replaced row crops on many farms. In the Middle Suwannee Basin many changes have also occurred.

The total acreages of land use and land cover in 1973 for the counties of the Middle Suwannee Basin is presented in Table 8. Forestland, agricultural land, and wetland comprised 99 percent of the total land use and land cover of these counties in 1973. Forestland accounted for 56 percent of the total area. Agricultural land, which was almost entirely cropland and pasture, made up 31 percent of the Basin. Wetland totalled 12 percent.

When the changes in land used for crop production that have occurred since 1840 in the Suwannee Basin are traced and analyzed, it becomes evident that the present is quite different from the past in several respects. The plantation as a unit of agricultural production has been replaced by farm units producing beef cattle, pulpwood, and some cash crops such as tobacco and peanuts. Corn continues to be an important crop. However, it is no longer grown as food for work stock and slaves, but primarily for the fattening of beef cattle. Cotton has completely disappeared. The peak acreage of total crop production was reached in 1910. Then came the boll weevil. The acreage used for crop production declined by about one-third by 1930. Farmers turned to peanuts and tobacco, and the acreage used for producing crops increased but never has reached the prior peak in acreage of 1910. Improved pastures are now widespread. Also planted pine which is harvested every 15 to 20 years for pulpwood occupies much land. Large landholdings still exist, but capital has supplanted labor as the second most important factor of production in the Middle Suwannee Basin. It is now land, capital, and labor and no longer land, labor, and capital.

When the present (1973) land use and land cover patterns of the 10 plantations of the Middle Suwannee Basin of 1850 are analyzed in

TABLE 8. Land use and land cover in the Middle Suwannee Basin by counties, 1973

	Alachua (acres)	Columbia (acres)	Hamilton (acres)	Madison (acres)	Suwannee (acres)
Urban or Built-up Land	33,231	13,502	5,634	6,940	8,105
Agricultural Land	219,033	113,086	61,311	120,291	210,198
Range Land	178	524	326	0	820
Forest Land	266,003	303,978	215,041	246,729	211,501
Water	32,104	1,799	821	2,401	1,888
Wetland	67,469	77,898	43,105	82,850	4,813
Barren Land	2,362	2,599	6,652	978	5,506
Total Area	620,380	513,386	332,890	460,189	442,831

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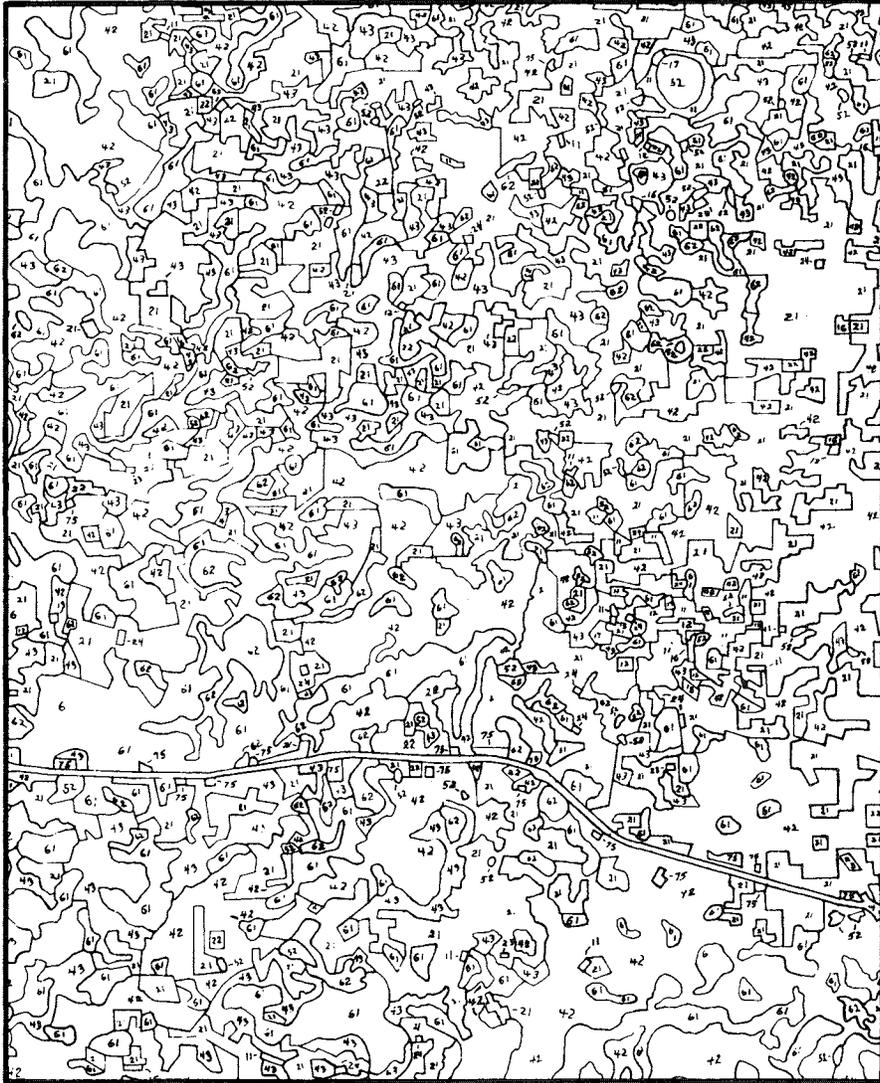


Fig. 9 Land use, central Madison County, Florida, 1973.



relation to crop patterns indicated by the census of 1850, some informative insights into the changing patterns of land resource use are gained (Fig. 9). In 1850, approximately 8,300 acres of land on the

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10 plantations of Madison and Jefferson Counties was used for crops and pasture (Table 6). In 1973, about 6,500 acres of the area occupied by those plantations was still being used as cropland and pasture. However, it is quite probable that some of the land now used for crops and pasture was not being used for that purpose in 1850. Land drainage, use of fertilizers, and supplemental irrigation are among the modern agricultural practices that have brought areas unsuitable for crops and pasture in 1850 in the Suwannee Basin into use as cropland and pasture in modern times. New crops such as peanuts and tobacco have replaced cotton, which has brought shifts in the kinds of soils being used for agriculture.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the simultaneous use of three different documentary sources available in the National Archives of the United States greatly enhances the geographical analysis and understanding of the settlement process in the Middle Suwannee Basin of Florida. The use of the manuscript records for the censuses of population and agriculture in combination with the records of the General Land Office makes it possible to actually pinpoint where people were living and farming during the settlement era. Using these archival records along with modern soil surveys and land use and land cover maps also provides meaningful insights into the processes that bring about land use changes over time.

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Explanation for Figure 9

<i>Level I</i>	<i>Level II</i>
1 Urban or Built-up Land	11 Residential
	12 Commercial and Services
	13 Industrial
	14 Transportation, Communications and Utilities
	15 Industrial and Commercial Complexes
	16 Mixed Urban or Built-up Land
	17 Other Urban or Built-up Land
2 Agricultural Land	21 Cropland and Pasture
	22 Orchards, Groves, Vineyards, Nurseries, and Ornamental Horticultural Areas
	23 Confined Feeding Operations
	24 Other Agricultural Land
3 Rangeland	31 Herbaceous Rangeland
	32 Shrub and Brush Rangeland
	33 Mixed Forest Land
4 Forest Land	41 Deciduous Forest Land
	42 Evergreen Forest Land
	43 Mixed Forest Land
5 Water	51 Streams and Canals
	52 Lakes
	53 Reservoirs
	54 Bays and Estuaries
6 Wetland	61 Forested Wetland
	62 Nonforested Wetland
7 Barren Land	75 Strip Mines, Quarries, and Gravel Pits
	76 Transitional Areas