

THINK LIKE A RESEARCHER



BY THE HISTORY WORKSHOP

THINK LIKE A RESEARCHER

LESSON AUTHOR:

The History Workshop

INTRODUCTION:

This lesson plan gives students the opportunity to explore how researchers combine data from historical and archaeological resources to answer research questions about the history of Mitchelville. This lesson plan builds on ideas and concepts introduced during Lessons One and Two. Students will analyze written accounts, photographs, and artifacts related to the occupation of Mitchelville to extract information, synthesize data, and assess and interpret data to answer questions.

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL:

3 and 4

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will analyze historical documents and photographs that contain information about Mitchelville.
- Students will interpret artifact data collected during the archaeology excavations at Mitchelville.
- Students will integrate historical and archaeological data to make conclusions about life at Mitchelville.

MATERIALS:

- Family and Friends Image
- Photograph Study Worksheet
- Houses at Mitchelville Image
- Photograph Analysis Worksheet
- Newspaper Article: Philadelphia Inquirer, 1863
- Mitchelville Photographs
- Artifact Collection
- Think Like a Researcher Worksheet

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: UNDERSTANDING MITCHELVILLE

In October 1862, Major General Ormsby Mitchel, commander of the Department of the South at Hilton Head Island ordered the construction of a Freedmen's town to serve as a new home for thousands of former slaves who flocked to the island after it fell to Union forces in November 1861. Mitchelville was more than a refugee camp. The town's new residents built their own homes with materials provided by the Union Army. They were responsible for creating their own government, enforcing town ordinances, establishing schools, and ensuring every child between the ages of six and 15 attended regularly. Mitchelville proved that freed men and women could govern, sustain, and educate themselves.



Map of Mitchelville in 1865.

At its peak in 1865, approximately 3,500 people may have lived in the town. Mitchelville declined after the US Army and the jobs it offered left the island in 1868. By the 1880s, Mitchelville ceased to exist as a formal town. By the 1950s, only the island's oldest residents remembered its important history.

THE BATTLE OF PORT ROYAL THE UNION BLOCKADE

At the start of the Civil War, President Lincoln and his military commanders planned to blockade Southern ports to stop the flow of supplies from Europe to the Confederate states and establish a series of bases from which to patrol the 3,500 miles of coastline that lay in Confederate territory.

At the same time, South Carolina Governor Francis Pickens directed General P. T. Beauregard, the new commander of South Carolina's provisional forces, to review the coastal defenses of the state. General Beauregard ordered the construction of Fort Walker and Fort Beauregard at the entrance to Port Royal Sound.

THE BATTLE OF PORT ROYAL

In October 1861, a joint Army and Navy expedition under General Thomas Sherman and Captain Samuel DuPont to set sail from Hampton Roads, Virginia. Port Royal Sound, South Carolina was their first target. By November 6, despite bad weather, a formidable flotilla of 25 ships sat at the entrance to Port Royal Sound.

“General. You will proceed to New York immediately and organize, in connection with Captain DuPont of the Navy, an expedition of 12,000 men. Its destination you and the Navy commander will determine after you have sailed. You should sail at the earliest possible moment.”

PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN

“I have just received the following information which I consider entirely reliable, that the enemy’s expedition is intended for Port Royal.”

MESSAGE TO GOVERNOR PICKENS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, NOVEMBER 1861



The Battle of Port Royal.

The Confederates occupied newly constructed Fort Walker on Hilton Head Island and Fort Beauregard on Bay Point. Fort Walker was garrisoned by the 11th Regiment of SC Volunteers commanded by Colonel William C. Heyward. Fort Beauregard was commanded by Colonel R. G. M. Dunovant. Four ships under the command of Flag Officer Josiah Tatnall were positioned on Skull Creek.

The battle began on the morning of November 7, 1861. The Confederates were under-manned and out-gunned. The Union armada steamed passed the Confederate forts in an elliptical pattern firing directly into the batteries.

“At last the memorable 7th dawned upon us, bright and serene; not a ripple upon the broad expanse of water to disturb the accuracy of fire from the broad decks of that magnificent armada about advancing in battle array, to vomit forth its iron hail with all the spiteful energy of long-suppressed rage and conscious strength.”

GENERAL THOMAS DRAYTON, NOVEMBER 24, 1861

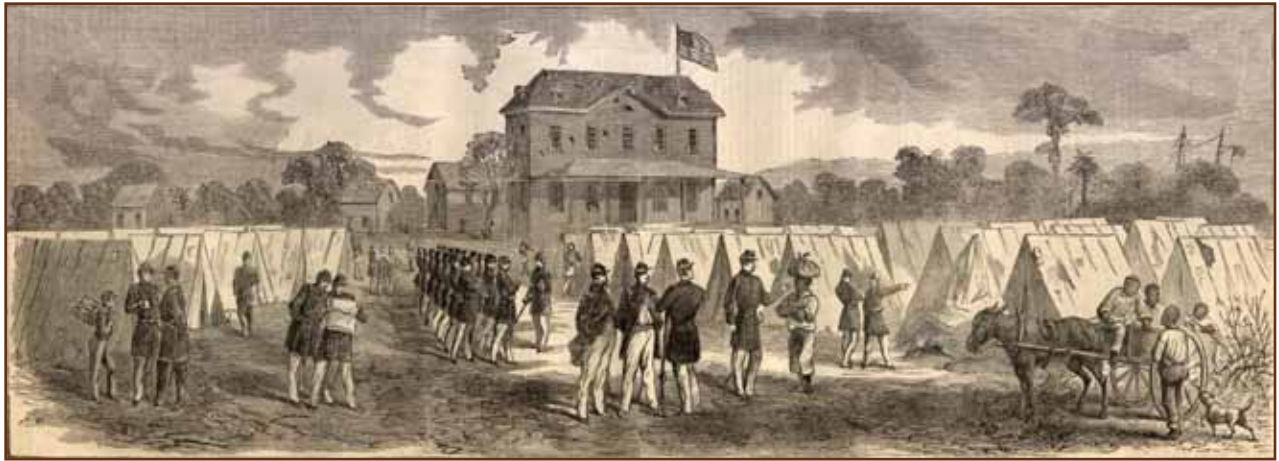
By 2:00 pm Confederate forces were defeated. Hilton Head Island, and later Beaufort and St. Helena Island fell to Union troops. Planters and their families abandoned the Sea Islands. Thousands of enslaved people escaped from bondage.

“Two o'clock had now arrived, when I noticed our men coming out of the fort, which they had bravely defended for 41/2 hours against fearful odds, and then only retiring when all but three of the guns on the water-front had been disabled, and only 500 pounds of powder in the magazine.”

GENERAL THOMAS DRAYTON, NOVEMBER 24, 1861



Gen. Thomas Drayton.



The Union encampment on Hilton Head Island.

THE UNION ARMY'S DEPARTMENT OF THE SOUTH

Hilton Head Island became the headquarters for the US Army's Department of the South and the chief operational port for the Navy's South Atlantic Blockading Squadron. The army built an inland line of defenses including Fort Sherman and Fort Welles, and an encampment with tent housing, Officer's quarters, Quartermaster's depot, guard house, commissaries, stables, blacksmith's shop, carpenter shop, bake house, and hospital.

"...the line of entrenchments projected and built at Hilton Head on the margin of Port Royal Harbor measured a mile and three-quarters in length, and embraced an area of perhaps six hundred acres. The palisades and embankments, beginning at the ocean beach on the east, extended across marshes and the upland to [Fish Haul] creek on the west...The whole work was immense, elaborate, scientific, expensive, and strong. Within were the headquarters of the Department of the South and the depots of ordnance and supplies for the army."

FREDERICK DENISON, 3RD RHODE ISLAND HEAVY ARTILLERY REGIMENT, 1879

The town of Hilton Head with shops, post office, printing office, theatre, church, photographer's studio, and hotels sprang up adjacent to the post. The 3rd New Hampshire Volunteers camped on Thomas Drayton's Fish Haul Plantation. A detail from the regiment was directed to build a saw mill. Lumber from the mill was used to build storehouses, docks, and barracks for the African American refugees arriving daily at the Union lines.



Thomas Drayton's Fish Haul plantation.

"Quite a town is being built about the Fort of portable houses built up North and shipped down here ready to be put up...Immense store houses have been put up in which government supplies for the troops are placed. Immense bakeries are in operation to supply us with the soft bread we have been eating for some months. All kinds of sutler and speculative establishments abound and do a thriving trade."

PENNSYLVANIA SOLDIER, 1862

MITCHELVILLE: FREEDOM'S HOME

CONTRABANDS FLOCK TO HILTON HEAD

One day after the Union Army and Navy captured Hilton Head, 80 escaped slaves arrived at Fort Walker. Within a month there were 400 contrabands at the encampment and their numbers increased daily.

“They are coming in great numbers...150 have come in, mostly able-bodied men, and it will soon be necessary to furnish them this coarse clothing.”

ASSISTANT QUARTERMASTER, CAPTAIN SAXTON, NOVEMBER 9, 1861

“This week, 48 escaped from a single plantation near Grahamville...After four days of trial and peril, hidden by day and threading the waters with their boats by night, evading the rebel pickets, joyfully entered camp at Hilton Head.”

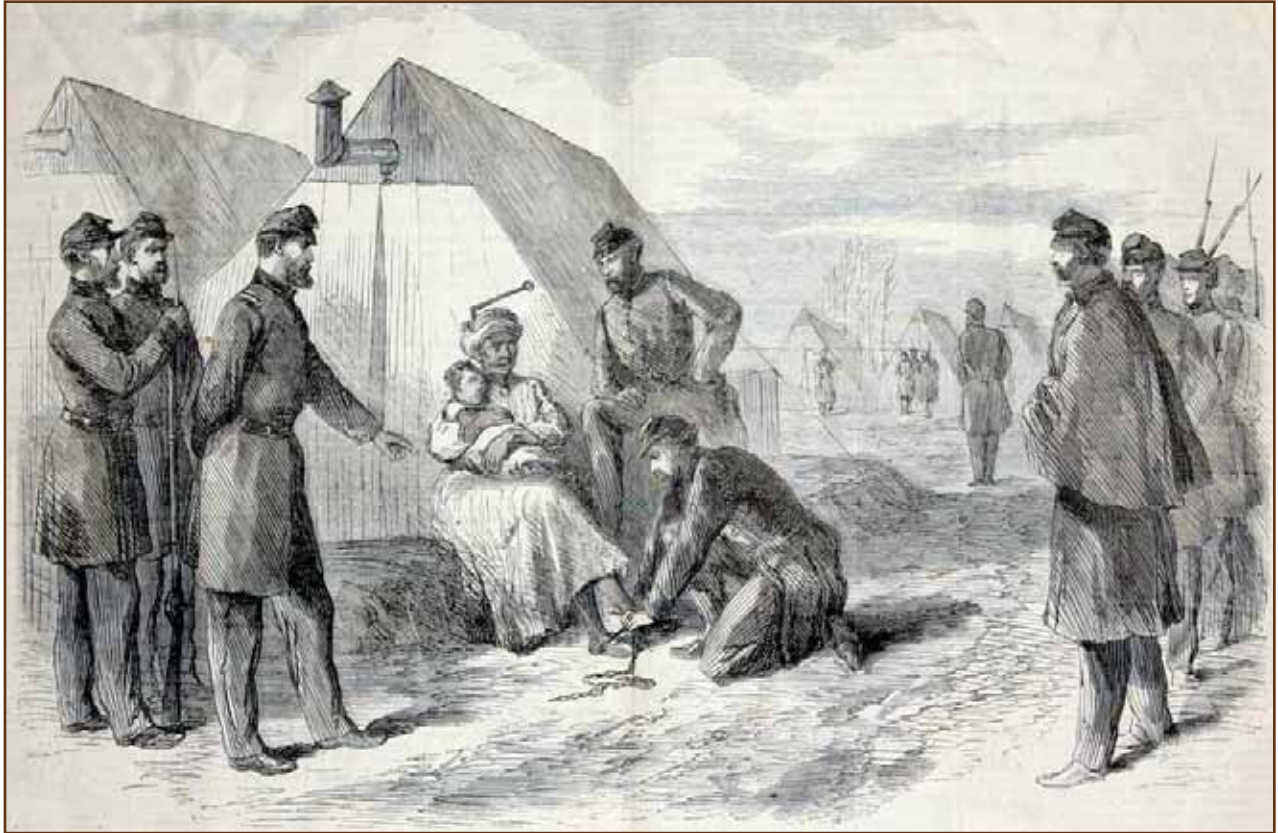
REPORT OF E. L. PIERCE, GOVERNMENT AGENT, FEBRUARY 3, 1862

Although commanders had a clear directive to hold former slaves, there was little guidance regarding their care. The Union Army was quickly overwhelmed by the scope of this humanitarian crisis since most of former slaves required food, clothing, and shelter. However, the army quickly realized that many of the able-bodied men and women were willing and able to provide much needed support to the rapidly growing encampment and town of Hilton Head.

The Quartermaster's department provided immediate aid by establishing refugee camps at Beaufort, Bay Point, and Otter Island. On Hilton Head, they built large barracks described in 1862 by Edward Pierce, Special Agent to the Department of the Treasury as *“two long rows of wooden buildings, nicely whitewashed on the outside, and having much the appearance of commissary storehouses, pierced with innumerable windows for the purpose of ventilation.”* As word spread that the army offered jobs and shelter, these facilities were soon overcrowded and unhealthy.

“These people were first called contrabands at Fortress Monroe; but at Port Royal, where they were next introduced to us in any considerable number, they were generally referred to as freedmen. These terms are milestones in our progress: and they are yet to be lost in the better and more comprehensive designation of citizens, or, when discrimination is convenient, citizens of African descent.”

EDWARD PIERCE, THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY, SEPTEMBER, 1863



Former slaves who escaped to Union lines were called Contrabands.

MORE THAN A REFUGEE CAMP

Major General Ormsby Mitchel, a staunch abolitionist, assumed command of Hilton Head Island on September 17, 1862. Mitchel was disturbed by the overcrowded conditions he found in the refugee barracks. In October, he ordered construction of a Freedmen's community north of the Union encampment on a portion of Fish Haul Plantation. Mitchel wanted to move the refugees out of the military depot, improve their living conditions, and give them some autonomy. Mitchelville, he said, would be more than a refugee camp, it would prove that freed men and women could govern, sustain, and educate themselves.

"...the present negro quarters, a long row of partitions into which are crowded young and old, male and female, without respect either to quality or quantity... the Major-General has ordered [it] to be removed outside [the encampments], and accordingly a piece of ground has been selected near the Drayton Plantation, about two miles off, for a negro village. The negroes are to be made to build their own houses, and as it is thought to be high time they should begin to learn what freedom means by experience of self-dependence, they are to be left as much as possible to themselves..."

NEW YORK TIMES, OCTOBER 8, 1862



A photograph of homes in Mitchelville labeled Refugee Quarters.

“Some wholesome changes are contemplated by the new regime (General Ormsby Mitchel assumed command on September 17, 1862), not the least of which is the removal of the negro quarters beyond the stockade...where they can at once have more comfort and freedom for improvement...Accordingly, a spot has been selected near the Drayton Plantation for a negro village. They are able to build their own houses, and will probably be encouraged to establish their own police and the supervision of their Superintendent. A teacher, Ashbell Landon, has been appointed, to be paid from the Quartermaster’s Department...Mr. McMath is at present the active and efficient Superintendent of these people on the island.”

NEW SOUTH, OCTOBER, 4, 1862

BUILDING FREEDOM’S HOME

Accounts say General Mitchel organized a contest between his engineers and the refugees, inviting each to build a sample cabin. He selected the house built by the contrabands as the model for Mitchelville’s homes. The Army Corps of Engineers laid out streets and lots. Contrabands built their own homes with lumber and nails provided by the army. In late October 1862, Mitchel reported groups of people building six houses a day.

[Mitchel] called [the contrabands] together, told them they must build houses for themselves. He gave instructions to the engineers, after he himself had selected the site for the proposed village, that they should build a log cabin as a sample. He also told the negroes to build a cabin after their own ideas, and he would decide which to take as a model for the rest of the buildings. The models were completed, and General Mitchel selected that built by the negroes. He then had all the contraband families

provided with boards, nails, hammers, etc. and told them to build on each lot which had been set off, a house for themselves. The negroes, unassisted by the advice or help of others than themselves, fell to work, and the result was the odd looking village, which they called Mitchelville.

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER, MAY 18, 1863

“The other day I went out with Gen. Mitchel, on his invitation, to see the beginning of the negro village that he has started. There were already fourteen houses in a good state of forwardness. He has a squad of fifty negroes at work, and they are averaging one house a day. The houses are very comfortable and commodious structures; built partly with slabs from the saw mills, and partly with rough timber worked out by the negroes themselves. Thus far the thing promises well, and the negroes enter into it with all their heart. In fact nothing has ever taken such hold of them as this hope—the first they have ever had—of having homes of their own.”

PRIVATE LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK EVENING POST

Historic photographs taken in 1864 by Civil War photographer Samuel Cooley show the great individuality of Mitchelville’s residences. Small framed houses were built on wooden piers or wooden sills set on the ground. Most of the houses were clad in wood siding. Roofs had wood, metal, or bitumen paper shingles. Each house had a chimney or coal-burning stove. Some had glass windows others wooden shutters. The photos also show an assortment of fences, canvas lean-tos, and other outdoor fixtures. Each family had a one-quarter or one-half acre to cultivate



Contraband office at Hilton Head.

“...they are very comfortable, so [the women] told me as they displayed with great pride the interior of their imaginative mansions. Each cabin has a lot attached to it, which the negro women keep in a good state of cultivation, and raise vegetables of all kinds, which command a ready sale in the camps, or at officers’ quarters

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER, MAY 18, 1863

KEEPING THE LAW

Self-government was essential to the success of Mitchelville. Only African Americans could live in the village. The town was governed by a supervisor and treasurer appointed by the military commander and councilmen elected by the residents. The council could enforce village ordinances, levy taxes, oversee sanitation and garbage regulations, and regulate all matters affecting the well-being of citizens and the good order of society. They were also charged with establishing schools and ensuring all children between the ages of six and 15 attended daily.

“As an evidence of the effects of the new system in inspiring self-reliance, it should be noted that the other evening they called a meeting of their own accord, and voted, the motion being regularly made and put, that it was now but just that they should provide the candles for their meetings, hitherto provided by the Government. A collection was taken at a subsequent meeting, and \$2.42 was the result.”

THE NEGROES AT PORT ROYAL: REPORT OF E. L. PIERCE, GOVERNMENT AGENT, TO HON. SALMON P. CHASE, SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY, FEBRUARY 3, 1862

JOBS, JOBS, JOBS!

Mitchelville’s residents earned a living working in the military encampment as pilots, guides, carpenters, personal servants, laundresses, cooks, blacksmiths, stable hands, and general laborers. Some people worked as paid laborers on local cotton plantations. Many people, particularly women, grew small gardens and raised chickens and pigs to support and feed their families. They sold vegetables, eggs, fish, and other food stuffs to the soldiers in the encampment. Many able-bodied men enlisted in the Union Army.



Recruitment offices.

“The people find employment in the stables, in the commissaries, in the stores, in policing the streets, and other situations. Some sell plants, oranges, and other edibles. They come over the narrow bridge in long lines in the morning, with buckets, baskets, bags, haversacks, etc. and return at evening with those articles filled variously. Some contain household necessaries, while others are filled with broken stale bread or other refuse of cookhouses. This may be called dry swill, and is intended for sundry black, white, and speckled swine.”

CHARLESTON LEADER, 1865

SHOPPING AT MITCHELVILLE

The US Army operated a commissary where both residents of Mitchelville and soldiers could buy food, personal items, and household goods. Government rations also were distributed from here. In addition, independent business owners could apply for a permit from the Treasury Department to operate a trading post or store in Mitchelville. Over the years, there may have been four or five stores in the village. William G. Tackaberry and Henry A. Ely opened a store in December 1864, and sold everything from coffee pots to shoe laces.

“There is a great demand for plates, knives, forks, tin ware, and better clothing, including even hoop skirts. Negro cloth...is very generally rejected. But there is no article if household furniture or wearing apparel, used by persons of moderate means among us, which they will not purchase when they are allowed the opportunity of labor and earning wages.”

ANONYMOUS, 1863

CITIZENSHIP THROUGH SERVICE

“Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters US, let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder, and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on earth or under the earth which can deny that he has earned the right of citizenship in the United States.”

FREDERICK DOUGLASS, 1863

The Confiscation Acts gave military commanders the authority to recruit slaves liberated in rebel territory. The Union army welcomed their labor and set them to non-combat fatigue duty. Former slaves served as cooks and servants, helped dig ditches, wrangled horses and cattle, and built camps and fortifications.

On January 1st, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation opened the door to combat service. Freedmen served in segregated regiments led by white officers. At the beginning, not all Union officers and soldiers welcomed the addition of Black soldiers.

“Say! Citizens of the Republic...will you have the government accept the proffered aid of these hundreds of thousands of willing men to help bring this war to a speedy end? Or will you allow the hatred of color, and the fear of destroying slavery to repel their aid, and prolong the horror of the war?”

EMANCIPATION LEAGUE, BOSTON, 1862

In time, their bravery and professionalism overcame this prejudice. African American soldiers proved their special zeal for victory over an old oppressor and for a new life as citizens. By the end of the war, nearly 200,000 African Americans, many former slaves, served in over 100 regiments. Nearly 40,000 men died. Twenty-five Black soldiers received the Congressional Medal of Honor for their heroic actions during the war.

“The experiment of arming blacks, so far as I have made it, has been a complete and even marvelous success...They are now eager beyond all things to take the field and be led into action, and it is the unanimous opinion of the officers who have had the charge of them, that in the peculiarities of this climate and country they will prove invaluable auxiliaries, fully equal to the similar regiments so long and successfully used by the British authorities in the West India Islands.”

GENERAL D. HUNTER, MAJOR-GENERAL COMMANDING

“The men are volunteers, having been led to enlist by duty to their race, to their kindred still in bonds, and to us, their allies.”

EDWARD L. PIERCE, THE FREEDMEN AT PORT ROYAL, SEPTEMBER 1863

SOUTH CAROLINA'S COLORED TROOPS

General David Hunter arrived on Hilton Head Island to assume command in March 1862. Hunter believed strongly that the Union Army should enlist contrabands as soldiers. He took action into his own hands by proclaiming that, as a military necessity, all persons in Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida held as slaves were free. His directive ordered all able-bodied men to go to Hilton Head for military service. President Lincoln reversed Hunter's order two weeks later, squashing his efforts to raise an African American regiment.

1ST SC VOLUNTEER INFANTRY



1st SC Volunteer Infantry at Beaufort, SC.

In late summer of 1862, General Rufus Saxton, with proper authority, recruited freedmen for the 1st South Carolina Volunteers (SCVI). Colonel Thomas Higginson arrived on Hilton Head in February 1863, to serve as the regiment's commander. The regiment was re-designated the 33rd United States Colored Infantry in 1864.

“On the 10th of October, General Saxton, being provided with competent authority to raise five thousand colored troops, began to recruit a regiment. His authority from the War Department bore the date August 25th, and the order conferring it states the object to be ‘to guard the plantations, and protect the inhabitants from captivity and murder.’ This was the first clear authority ever given by the Government to raise a negro regiment in this war.”

**EDWARD L. PIERCE, THE FREEDMEN AT PORT ROYAL,
SEPTEMBER 1863**

2ND SC VOLUNTEER INFANTRY

On May 22, 1863, Colonel James Montgomery mustered freedmen from Hilton Head Island and Beaufort into the 2nd SCVI (later 34th USCT). Ten days later, during a raid on Combahee River plantations led by Montgomery and Harriet Tubman, they freed 800 slaves in a single night.

3RD SC VOLUNTEER INFANTRY

After the Combahee River raid, Harriet Tubman took 100 freed slaves to the recruiting office on Hilton Head Island where they enlisted in the 3rd SCVI. The regiment moved to Jacksonville, FL in 1864 and joined the 4th SCVI to form the 21st USCT.

POSTBELLUM MITCHELVILLE

The Civil War ended on April 9, 1865. The 21st US Colored Infantry Regiment (3rd SCIV) returned to Hilton Head Island in 1867 and mustered out of Federal service. The Federal army officially left Hilton Head in January 1868, and with it went many paying jobs. The people of Mitchelville did not have clear title to their homes and began to leave, looking for work and a new life. Soon many homes were abandoned; the old houses often salvaged for building materials. In 1875, heirs of the original owner paid back taxes and obtained title to Fish Haul Plantation, including Mitchelville. The heirs subdivided and sold the property in small lots. In 1885, Freedman Gabriel Gardner purchased 650 acres which he divided into small lots to sell. Mitchelville ceased to be a town and became a close-knit, kinship-based community.

By 1900, there were 2,235 people on Hilton Head Island. Almost all were African Americans. Wealthy northerners began to buy large sections of the island including land owned by native islanders. By 1900, African Americans owned only one-quarter of the land. By the early 20th century Mitchelville no longer appeared on maps of the area. Fish Haul Plantation and the land that was once Mitchelville were sold to the Hilton Head Company in 1950.

THE GULLAH GEECHEE LEGACY

Today Hilton Head's native islanders, the descendants of enslaved people who lived and worked on Sea Island and Lowcountry plantations, are known as Gullah Geechee people. Their diverse African roots and enslavement in isolated communities created a unique culture that is embodied in their cuisine, music and performing arts, language and oral traditions, crafts, and religion and spirituality.

In 2006, the US Congress created the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. The Corridor encompasses a cultural and linguistic area along the southeastern coast of the United States from Pender County, North Carolina to St. John's County, Florida and 30 miles inland. The Corridor celebrates, preserves, and shares the important contributions made to American culture and history by Gullah Geechee people. Mitchelville is an important destination along the Corridor.

PRESERVING MITCHELVILLE

Mitchelville is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. A significant portion of the village is preserved at Fish Haul Creek Park owned and operated by the Town of Hilton Head Island. The park is the future home of Mitchelville Freedom Park. The Mitchelville Preservation Project is working to create a multi-media visitor experience that will celebrate the historical, cultural, social, political, economic, and spiritual story of Mitchelville's former residents.

GULLAH GEECHEE GENEALOGY

The Heritage Library Foundation, students from Clemson University, and members of the Mitchelville Preservation Project are working with Ancestry.com to identify people who lived at Mitchelville between 1862 and 1868. Using hospital and military records, information from the National Archives in Washington, DC, and local family documents they have discovered the names of over 500 residents. They hope to connect living descendants to their Mitchelville ancestors.

ARCHAEOLOGY AT MITCHELVILLE

WHAT DO ARCHAEOLOGISTS STUDY?

Archaeologists are scientists who learn about the past by excavating and interpreting information buried in the ground. They study objects people lost, threw away, or left behind. Archaeology is one of the few ways we can learn about people who left no written records. In North America, 95 percent of human history happened before there was writing on this continent. Archaeologists excavate sites to unearth artifacts and features that can answer questions about when, who, where, how, and why people lived and worked at a particular place and time.

Archaeologists who study the historic past learn about people who came to or lived in North America after Europeans arrived. Historic archaeologists use information they recover through excavation along with wills, tax records, diaries, journals, maps, and a host of other archival records. Archaeologists working at Mitchelville had maps, photographs, and even names of some of the town's former residents.

WHAT IS AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE?

An archaeological site is any place where we find evidence of past human activities. The portion of Mitchelville adjacent to the Hilton Head Island Airport is site number 38BU2301. The 38 stands for South Carolina, the 38th state alphabetically. The BU stands for Beaufort County. This portion of Mitchelville is the 2,301st site identified in the county. The site was excavated because it would be disturbed by construction of the new Hilton Head Island Airport runway safety zone. The archaeologists hoped to learn about life in Mitchelville.

HOW DO ARCHAEOLOGISTS FIND SITES?

Archaeologists have many tools that help them locate archaeological sites. They use old maps and other historical documents to see where people used to live. Archaeologists talk to people who remember where buildings, cemeteries, barns, roads, fences, and graves used to be. They study the land because people often live on high ground near a water source. New research techniques such as GIS (Geographic Information Systems) help them create environmental models that can predict where archaeological sites might be located.

Archaeologists use equipment, such as ground penetrating radar (GPR), to find walls, foundations, and graves beneath the ground surface. GPR uses radio waves to locate anomalies in the soil. Variations in soil texture and chemistry and variations in materials (for example, sand versus clay or soil versus brick or stone) reflect the radio waves differently.

Archaeologists use metal detectors to find nails, buttons, and other metal artifacts that may be associated with former buildings, military encampments, battlefields, and any other sites where metal artifacts are expected. The metal detector emits electromagnetic waves that reflect off metal artifacts. Iron and steel reflect the waves differently than other metals such as brass, copper, silver, and gold. The metal detector emits a sound to the operator when it passes over a metal object. Archaeologists must dig at each locale where the metal detector signals an artifact to determine what object is present. Metal detecting was an important part of the investigations at Mitchelville.

All of these techniques produce clues to where sites may be located. Archaeologists must visit potential locations and conduct field investigations to know for certain whether an important site is present. Archaeological site 38BU2103 was found during a systematic survey. Archaeologists walked straight lines called transects. They examined the ground surface and dug small holes called shovel test pits every 100 feet along each transect. Investigators recorded the location of each shovel test pit and collected any artifacts they found. Areas that contained artifacts or cultural features were given archaeological site numbers.

HOW DO ARCHAEOLOGISTS EXCAVATE SITES?

Archaeological sites are fragile, non-renewable resources. Once a site is excavated it is gone forever. Archaeologists only excavate sites when they are threatened by destruction or when they can reveal important information that cannot be found any other way. Archaeologists working at Mitchelville wanted to find evidence of former houses so they could learn about how people lived at Mitchelville.

MAKE A PLAN:

Archaeologists must have research questions and a plan for excavating a site.

SET OUT A GRID:

Archaeologists create a measured grid across the area that will be studied to keep track of where they dig test units. They record the horizontal (side to side) and vertical (up and down) location of features and artifacts.

EXCAVATE UNITS:

Archaeologists excavate square or rectangular units to uncover features and recover artifacts. Archaeologists use shovels, trowels, spoons, whisk brooms, and dental picks to carefully remove the soil. The units are dug in layers so archaeologists know the depth below the ground surface where the artifacts and features are found. Excavators sift all of the excavated dirt through ¼-inch wire mesh screen to help them find artifacts.

IDENTIFYING ARTIFACTS:

All artifacts are washed, identified, cataloged, and analyzed. All of this information is entered into a computer database. Archaeologists spend a lot more time in the laboratory identifying and analyzing artifacts than they do excavating a site.

WRITE A REPORT:

Archaeologists analyze the data to answer the questions they set out in their research design. They present their ideas and conclusions in a report so other researchers and scientists, interested citizens, and descendants who may have ties to the people who once lived or worked at the site can read about their work.

During the 2012 and 2013 investigations, archaeologists began by digging small shovel test pits across the project area looking for artifacts and features. They used this information to identify areas for further investigation. They used metal detectors to find nails, buttons, bullets, and other

metal objects. The archaeologists found several areas they thought might contain evidence of Mitchelville houses. They excavated a series of large units by hand in each area. They mapped and excavated soil features to understand the size, shape, and organization of the houses and carefully screened the dirt to recover artifacts.

Once the excavations were completed, the archaeologists studied all of the information they collected from the objects and features to understand where people lived and what kinds of activities happened at Mitchelville. Finally, they wrote a report about their findings. This report is available from South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia.

ARCHAEOLOGY VOCABULARY:

Archaeological Site is any location where the physical evidence (artifacts) of past human activities exist.

Artifacts are objects made and/or used by people. Archaeologists analyze artifacts to obtain information about how people lived in the past.

Clothing Artifacts include objects used to make clothes (needles, pins, scissors, etc.) or items used on clothes (button, buckles, beads, fasteners, cuff links, etc.).

Compass is a navigational aid that uses the magnetic field of the earth to point to magnetic North.

Decomposition is the breakdown of organic substances into simpler forms, and eventually dirt.

Ecofacts are plant and animal remains that help archaeologists understand the natural resources people ate, made clothes with, or used to build their homes.

Excavation Units are larger square or rectangular excavations. Units are dug in layers so archaeologists can record where artifacts and features are located.

Features are soil anomalies created when people build houses, dig garbage pits, wells, cellars, and latrines, sweep their yards, build a fire, and many other activities. A feature can be a piece of house foundation, a stain left by a rotted post, a hole where someone buried garbage, a camp fire, a scatter of shells and bones where someone ate a meal, anywhere a human activity left its mark.

Historic Period is the time that begins with written record keeping in North America until continues until 50 years ago

Stratigraphy is the layering of one soil deposit upon another. Generally, in nature the oldest soils and materials are in the lowest layers. The newest soils are in the layers closest to the earth's surface. This is called the Law of Superposition. It is an important principal in archaeology because it helps archaeologists date the objects and features they find.

Kitchen Artifacts are fragments of dishes, cutlery, and bottle glass. They tell us about the household goods people used, foods they cooked, and how wealthy they were.

Metal Detector is an instrument that emits electromagnetic waves that reflect off metal artifacts. The metal detector emits a sound to the operator when it passes over a metal object.

Personal Artifacts include jewelry, toys, coins, watches, pocket knives, and other items owned by an individual for their personal use. These objects give us a glimpse into the more intimate aspects of people's lives.

Postholes are soil stains created when people dig a hole, insert a wooden post, and refilled the hole with dirt. As the post rots, it adds organic material to the post hole and turns the soil a darker color. Posts holes can be the remnants of houses, buildings, fences, palisades, or any structure with a wooden frame.

Prehistoric is the time before the arrival of Europeans in North America and before written records are kept.

Research Question is the archaeologists' hypothesis they want to test by studying a site.

Shovel Test Pits are a small hole approximately one foot across that is dug one to three feet deep. Archaeologists dig small holes to find sites and to decide where to dig larger units.

Trowels are a small hand tool with a triangle head that terminates in a point. Archaeologists use this tool to carefully excavate sites.

MITCHELVILLE ARCHAEOLOGY

In the late 1980s, Dr. Michael Trinkley found remnants of Mitchelville and recorded them as an archaeological site. Dr. Trinkley conducted the first archaeological investigations and thorough study of Mitchelville in 1986. The site was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988.

In 2012 archaeologists with Brockington and Associates, Inc. identified a portion of Mitchelville adjacent to the Hilton Head Island Airport runway. It was designated archaeological site 38BU2301. The South Carolina State Historic Preservation office determined the site eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Since it was necessary to improve airport safety by extending the runway safety zone, archeologists conducted extensive excavations to recover important information about Mitchelville before construction began.

Archaeologists found 85 features and more than 20,000 artifacts. Site 38BU2301 may contain evidence of some of the last houses built in Mitchelville, possibly as late as 1864 or 1865, when military officials ordered any refugee families still living in the encampment to move to the village. All of the data and artifacts gathered during this work were analyzed and interpreted. The results

are presented in a written report that is available to researchers and the public through the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia and the website, Finding Freedom's Home: Archaeology at Mitchelville.

FEATURES AT MITCHELVILLE

During the 2013 study, archaeologists investigated the southwestern edge Mitchelville. An 1865 map shows nearly 50 houses were built in this part of the town. Photographs from 1864 show what some of the Mitchelville houses looked like and give us clues to the kinds of features archaeologists might find in the ground. Archaeologists knew the buildings were long gone. They wondered if any evidence of houses would remain as features. There are many factors that determine whether features form in the soil. Archaeologists studying Mitchelville worried there might not be features because:

- The houses were not there very long.
- The house foundations were shallow.
- The 1893 hurricane washed buildings away.
- The houses were dismantled and removed.

Archaeologists found 85 features including wells, post holes, garbage pits, storage pits, and root cellars.

POST HOLES

Archaeologists found post holes they think were part of three former Mitchelville houses, including Benjamin "Renty" Gibson's house. Renty Gibson was born on Hilton Head Island in 1836. In 1863, he enlisted in the 21st USCT and served as a teamster in the Quartermaster's department. After the war Gibson returned to Hilton Head and took up farming with his wife Judy. In 1899, Gibson purchased six acres of land from Viola Holmes – land that had once been part of Mitchelville. Renty and Judy Gibson refurbished or built a new home on their land. This may be one of the houses archaeologists found during the 2013 excavations. Renty Gibson died at Hilton Head Island on May 18, 1909, and is buried in the Government Cemetery with a military marker.

BARREL WELLS

Mitchelville's homes did not have running water. Instead town residents used community wells. Usually these were barrel wells because they were easy to build on Hilton Head Island where there are sandy soils and a high water table. Residents dug a hole as deep as they could and inserted a bottomless barrel into the hole. Water collected in the barrel. The barrel kept the water clean and prevented the sides of the hole from collapsing. Sometimes a roof and outer walls were built to keep unwanted debris from falling into the well. Archaeologists found two wells during the excavations. They know the features were barrel wells because they found dark soil where the barrel staves rotted away and pieces of the metal bands that held the barrel together.

GARBAGE PITS

Mitchelville had a town ordinance that required residents to dispose of their garbage at designated places. During the 2013 investigations, archaeologists found a large garbage dump full of broken

dishes, bottle glass fragments, nails, buttons, bullets, container glass, and many other artifacts. This looked like garbage from more than one household. Perhaps it was a communal dumping area.

ARTIFACTS FROM MITCHELVILLE

Artifacts are objects made and/or used by people who lived in the past. Artifacts are often the only link archaeologists have to the people they wish to understand. Artifacts give archaeologists clues about what people ate, what their houses were made of, what tools they owned, how rich or poor they were, and how long ago they lived at a site. Artifacts are our most tangible connection to the past.

Archaeologists found more than 20,000 artifacts during the 2013 excavations. These objects are the remnants of the homes, household goods, foods, personal belongings, and tools owned and used by the town's residents. Fragments of china, a bead or button, the neck of a bottle, a piece of pipe, nails, a broken slate pencil, the back of a watch, a padlock, an iron spoon, all show us that the people of Mitchelville had the means and the desire to acquire consumer products. Their choices demonstrate their efforts to identify themselves as free people. Clothes, jewelry, and other everyday items express the individual personalities and collective identity of the town's residents.

ARCHITECTURAL ARTIFACTS

Architecture-related artifacts can include nails, window glass, roofing slates, shutter hooks, door latches, door knobs, hinges, keys, bricks, paving stone, and plaster. These kinds of artifacts give us information about how homes were constructed, the dimensions of buildings, the quality of interior fittings, and how a building was used.

At Mitchelville archaeologists recovered 11,314 artifacts that helped them identify the location of former homes and learn more about how the houses were constructed. Historical documents and photographs show us that houses at Mitchelville were simple wooden buildings clad in weatherboard. They were not built on brick foundations or on posts set deep into the ground. Some houses had glass windows, while others just had shutters. Archaeologists working at Mitchelville over the years have discovered one of the best ways to find former houses in the town is by locating concentrations of nails. The nails may be all that remain after the wooden boards rot away. At 38BU2301 even nails were difficult to find. Archaeologists believe that this portion of Mitchelville contained some of the last houses built in the town and that these houses may have been lived in for only a few years (1863 until 1868). They also think houses in this area were dismantled to salvage the building materials.

EDUCATION ARTIFACTS

Some of the most striking personal items found at Mitchelville are ink bottles, slate tablet and pencil fragments, and a pen nib. These objects remind us of the importance the people of Mitchelville placed on learning. Soon after the Union Army captured Hilton Head Island, missionaries from Northern states began to arrive on the island to set up schools. Even before missionaries arrived on the island, former slaves who knew how to read began teaching others. Mitchelville was the first community in SC to make school attendance compulsory for all children.

DOING HISTORICAL RESEARCH:

Historians study the past by gathering information from written records, photographs, and other graphic representations to learn about people, places, and events. The time after which written records are available varies from region to region in the United States and from country to country around the world. Learning about the past helps us to appreciate our traditions and the traditions of others, and our country's heritage. History can help us understand how the past shapes the world today. Historical research gives us insight into the people who lived and worked at Mitchelville.

HOW DO WE LEARN ABOUT THE PAST FROM WRITTEN RECORDS?

Historians use primary sources such as personal diaries, journals, letters, tax records, census records, wills, plats, photographs, military records, and court papers. Historians take the information they find in primary sources and weave them together to tell a story of the past as they understand it. Sometimes they use other historians' interpretations of events and people. These are secondary sources of information. Although these sources are further removed from the events and people they describe, they can often provide a more comprehensive view of the past.

HOW DO HISTORIANS UNDERTAKE RESEARCH?

Here are basic steps a historian follows to do research.

- The historian selects a property, person or event to study.
- The historian outlines questions to answer.
- The historian visits libraries and archives, reads old newspapers, conducts oral histories, and examines personal collections to collect information.
- The historian analyzes this information, makes conclusions, and writes about their findings.

CIVIL WAR PHOTOGRAPHY

PICTURING MITCHELVILLE

The American Civil War was one of the first major conflicts to be photographed extensively. Photographers worked as private citizens and as employees of the Confederate or Union governments. Photographers traveled into harm's way, photographing camp life, preparations for battle, and the battle's aftermath.

Mathew Brady is probably the best-known of these photographers. He felt it was his duty to document the war and petitioned President Lincoln for permission. Lincoln agreed as long as Brady financed the project himself. He hired a team of photographers and fitted them out with traveling studios loaded onto wagons. Brady's photographs were reintroduced to the American public in 1990, thanks to Ken Burns' ground breaking documentary about the Civil War.

Photographs of the war became popular nationwide and were often sold as stereo views, three dimensional photographs created with a twin lens camera. The photographs were viewed with handheld stereoscopes developed in Great Britain in the early 1800s and refined by Frenchman Jules Duboscq in 1851. Oliver Wendell Holmes introduced a small affordable version in 1861.

In 1864, Samuel A. Cooley, official photographer with the US Army, traveled to Hilton Head Island. He took a series of photographs of the Union encampment and Mitchelville. Today, thousands of photographs, including Cooley's images, can be viewed online through the Library of Congress or the National Archives and Records Administration.

Samuel Cooley took eight known photographs of Mitchelville in 1864. These photographs show the small, modestly constructed Mitchelville houses that are described in the photo legends as "refugee quarters." We are fortunate Cooley took the time to visit Mitchelville and take these photos. Perhaps his interest speaks to the importance and uniqueness of this experimental community. The images show the individuality of residences. Some are symmetrical and front-gabled; others are asymmetrical or have multiple doors on the façade. Most were framed houses clad in weatherboard siding with raised wooden floors. Some have glazed windows, board doors, and tar paper roofs while others have unglazed shuttered windows, and wood shingled roofs. Most buildings seem to have only one room although several houses appear to have small additions. The photographs show an assortment of fences, canvas lean-tos, and other outdoor fixtures. One home seems to have a privy.



Samuel A. Cooley, official photographer with the US Army.

The photographs also confirm historical accounts that the village was comprised of rows of regularly spaced houses on broad streets, with each house at the front of a small lot . As illustrated in the 1865 map, the irregular spatial arrangement of houses on the southern, eastern and western fringes suggests these areas may have been development later as the population reached its peak in late 1864 and 1865. With much of the population seeking employment at the military depot, the first homes would have been constructed close to the bridge over the marsh at the north end of the island. Indeed, these areas in the northeastern fringe toward the shore appear far more orderly with a more evenly distributed pattern within the blocks.

LESSON ACTIVITIES:

ACTIVITY ONE: A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

- As a teacher-guided classroom activity, students will analyze a modern photograph to develop their skills for working with historic photographic resources in Activities Two and Three.
- The teacher will project the Activity One Image: Family and Friends or distribute handouts of the picture to the class.
- As a teacher-guided classroom activity students will:
 - o Study the photograph for two minutes and form an overall impression of the picture.
 - o Make a list of the people, objects, and activities in the picture.
 - o List three (3) things that can be inferred from the picture.
 - o Make a list of questions the photograph raises.
 - o Make a list of ways to find answers to the questions.
- Facts and interpretations are recorded by the teacher or each student to use during completion of the assessment worksheet.

ASSESSMENT:

Students will work in groups or individually to complete the Activity One Photograph Study Worksheet.

ACTIVITY TWO: PICTURING MITCHELVILLE

- Teacher will discuss Sam Cooley, the Civil War photographer who visited Mitchelville in 1864 to introduce the historic photos that will be used in the historic photograph study.
 - o Who was Sam Cooley?
 - o Why is it important to document wars?
 - o Why do you think Sam Cooley decided to visit Mitchelville?
 - o Why are there no battle scenes in Civil War photographs?
 - o What information can we learn from a photograph?
 - o Should we believe everything we see in a photograph?
- Students will study a photograph of a house at Mitchelville. Use Activity Two Image: Houses at Mitchelville. The teacher will project and/or handout the photograph.
- As teacher-led classroom activity, students will fill out the Question One and the Photo Analysis Chart on the Activity Two Photograph Analysis Worksheet.

ASSESSMENT:

Students will complete the Activity Two Photograph Analysis Worksheet.

ACTIVITY THREE: THINKING LIKE A RESEARCHER

- Teacher will remind students about the different kinds of data researchers use to understand the past (historical documents and photographs and archaeological information from features and artifacts).
- The teacher will project and/or handout three sources of information about Mitchelville including a newspaper article; two photographs; and a collection of artifacts. Use the following documents: Activity Three Newspaper Article; Activity Three Mitchelville Photographs; and Activity Three Artifact Collection.
- The teacher will lead the class in a review each source of information.
- Students will work in groups or individually to complete the Activity Three Think Like a Researcher Worksheet.

ASSESSMENT:

Complete Activity Three Think Like a Researcher Worksheet.

STANDARDS:

Standard 3-4: The student will demonstrate an understanding of life in the antebellum period, the causes and effects of the Civil War, and the impact of Reconstruction in South Carolina.

- 3-4.1 Compare the economic conditions for various classes of people in South Carolina, including the elite, the middle class, the lower class, the independent farmers, and the enslaved and free African Americans.
- 3-4.5 Explain how the destruction caused by the Civil War affected the economy and daily lives of South Carolinians, including the scarcity of food, clothing, and living essentials and the continuing racial tensions.
- 3-4.6 Summarize the positive and negative effects of Reconstruction in South Carolina, including the development of public education; the establishment of sharecropping; racial advancements and tensions; and the attempts to rebuild towns, factories, and farms.

Standard 4-6: The student will demonstrate an understanding of the causes, the course, and the effects of the American Civil War.

- 4-6.5 Explain the social, economic, and political effects of the Civil War on the United States.

RESOURCES:

Finding Freedom's Home website www.findingfreedomshome.com

Society for American Archaeology www.saa.org

Society for Historical Archaeology www.sha.org

Mitchelville Preservations Project www.mitchelvillepreservationproject.com

Coastal Discovery Museum www.coastaldiscovery.org

Heritage Library www.heritagelib.org

Penn Center www.penncenter.com

South Carolina Department of Archives and History www.scdah.sc.gov

Gullah Geechee Cultural heritage Corridor www.gullahgeecheecorridor.org

Ancestry www.ancestry.com

Library of Congress www.loc.gov

National Archives and Records Administration www.archives.gov

FURTHER READING:

The Battle of Port Royal by Michael Coker

The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina 1514-1861 by Lawrence Rowland

Freedom National by James Oakes

Mitchelville: Experiment in Freedom by Michael Trinkley

Archaeology by Robert Kelly and David Hurst Thomas. Published by Wadsworth Press, 2009.

Archaeology: Down to Earth by Robert Kelly and David Hurst Thomas. Published by Wadsworth Press, 2010.

Field Methods in Archaeology by Thomas Hester. Published by Left Coast Press, 2008.

Archaeology for Kids: Uncovering the Mysteries of the Past by Ricahrd Panchyk. Published by Chicago Review Press, 2001.