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# ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT FORT COOPER INVERNESS, FLORIDA

by  
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*AUTHOR'S NOTE—Archaeological sites occasionally become associated with individuals who are particularly involved in their interpretation. In a sense, the significance of any site can be realized only through the efforts of those who recognize its importance.*

*John H. Eden, Jr., who formerly owned the Fort Cooper property, kept the site intact and offered it for sale to the State upon condition that it be developed as an historical park. The site was purchased with approval of the Florida State Cabinet on December 30, 1970. Since then, Mr. Eden has made every effort to assist State personnel in their researches aimed at making the park a reality. He has given freely of his accumulated research knowledge, and often he has gone out of his way to provide facilities and housing accommodations, as well as a congenial personal atmosphere to State personnel engaged in background or on-site research of Fort Cooper.*

*At a time when archaeological sites are being destroyed in large numbers, often with seeming indifference, Mr. Eden's exercise of civic responsibility is particularly commendable.*

## INTRODUCTION

The second phase of excavations at Fort Cooper, conducted during the summer of 1975, was designed as a follow-up study based on preliminary research conducted by Frank B. Fryman in 1971. An unpublished report of Fryman's work entitled "Exploratory Excavations at Fort Cooper, Citrus County, Florida" was completed in May of 1972 and is on file at the Florida Department of State, Division of Archives, History and Records Management.

The objectives of the second phase research were the following: to conduct intensive excavations as a means of locating structures within the picketwork of the fort; to reexamine the gaps in the picketwork in hopes of finding a blockhouse associated with the fort; and to investigate other related aspects of the site, such as the location of the old military road and the extent and impact possible rebuilding of the fort structure might have on the aboriginal component of the site.

These objectives were only partially accomplished by the 1975 excavations. The lack of total success can be attributed partially to the limited time available for excavation and also to certain peculiarities of the site which will be discussed in greater detail in this report.

This report should be read in conjunction with one by Michael Schene entitled *Georgia Volunteers and Fort Cooper* [see page 15]. Mr. Schene was the historian for the Fort Cooper Project, and his report supplies the historical

context within which the archaeological research may be viewed to best advantage.

## FORT COOPER AND THE COVE OF THE WITHLACOOCHEE

The Georgia Volunteers under the leadership of Mark Anthony Cooper were mustered into the army for a term of three months at Picolata, on the St. Johns River, on February 18, 1836. The overall campaign in Florida at the time was under the command of Major General Winfield Scott, whose plan of attack was to divide the army into three "wings" which would operate in a pincer-like fashion and force the Seminoles into a decisive battle.

Major Cooper's volunteers, numbering 321, comprised part of the "right wing" which was led personally by General Scott. This wing was to march south from Fort Drane (near present day Ocala), cross the Withlacoochee River, and, with the help of the other two wings, defeat the Indians who would have been forced to converge in the area as a result of these military maneuvers.

By April 2 the right wing had crossed the Withlacoochee, engaged in a skirmish with one Seminole war party and reached the southwestern edge of the Cove of the Withlacoochee. In the meantime, contact and coordination among the wings had been lost and General Scott realized that the campaign was a failure.

Since the progress of the march toward Tampa Bay was severely slowed by casualties,

Most of the pit was excavated using arbitrary levels as control units. This method resulted in the mixing of artifacts from different fill zones (indicated as F, F1, F2, F3, and F4 in Fig. 11). After these fill zones became evident in the profile they were excavated separately, but the remains associated with the fill lenses were not diagnostic. A portion of a woman's shoe in F3, however, along with a glass cologne or perfume bottle stopper and a Parian ware statuette, found in the general fill, suggest that the household was not devoid of the amenities available to a successful late 19th century settler.

One explanation for the contents of the trash pit is that it actually represents the remains of two households. Pipe bowls, gunflints and some of the glass bottle fragments are items which are normally associated with the first half of the 19th century while other ceramic and glass items date to the end of the century. There is no record of whether or not a house was located on the property in 1890, when the land grant was issued to William Nelson. If this was the case, the earlier artifacts could have been discarded as part of a housecleaning operation on the part of the new owners.

Food remains indicate that the inhabitants took advantage of naturally occurring food sources in addition to utilizing the livestock and produce they raised themselves.

Future excavation of the associated house structure or structures should shed more light on the day-to-day existence of the early settlers in this region of Florida.

#### ARTIFACTS AND FAUNAL REMAINS

Table 1 lists the total inventory of artifacts recovered from the picketwork and interior excavations at Fort Cooper in 1975. The most remarkable attribute of the list seems to be its brevity.

Since Fort Cooper was a military site used for short periods of time we would not expect to find a large artifact inventory. Even with this in mind, however, it is difficult to account for the absence of certain artifact categories. No pipe stems were found inside the fort proper, nor were any gunflints or percussion caps recovered. Fragments of only one 19th century wine bottle were found near the south wall bastion. These artifacts are normally common on early 19th century military sites, and their absence from the Fort Cooper site is difficult to explain.

Personalities of individual commanders often loomed large in Second Seminole War history. Major Cooper, according to historical accounts, abstained from the consumption of alcohol and

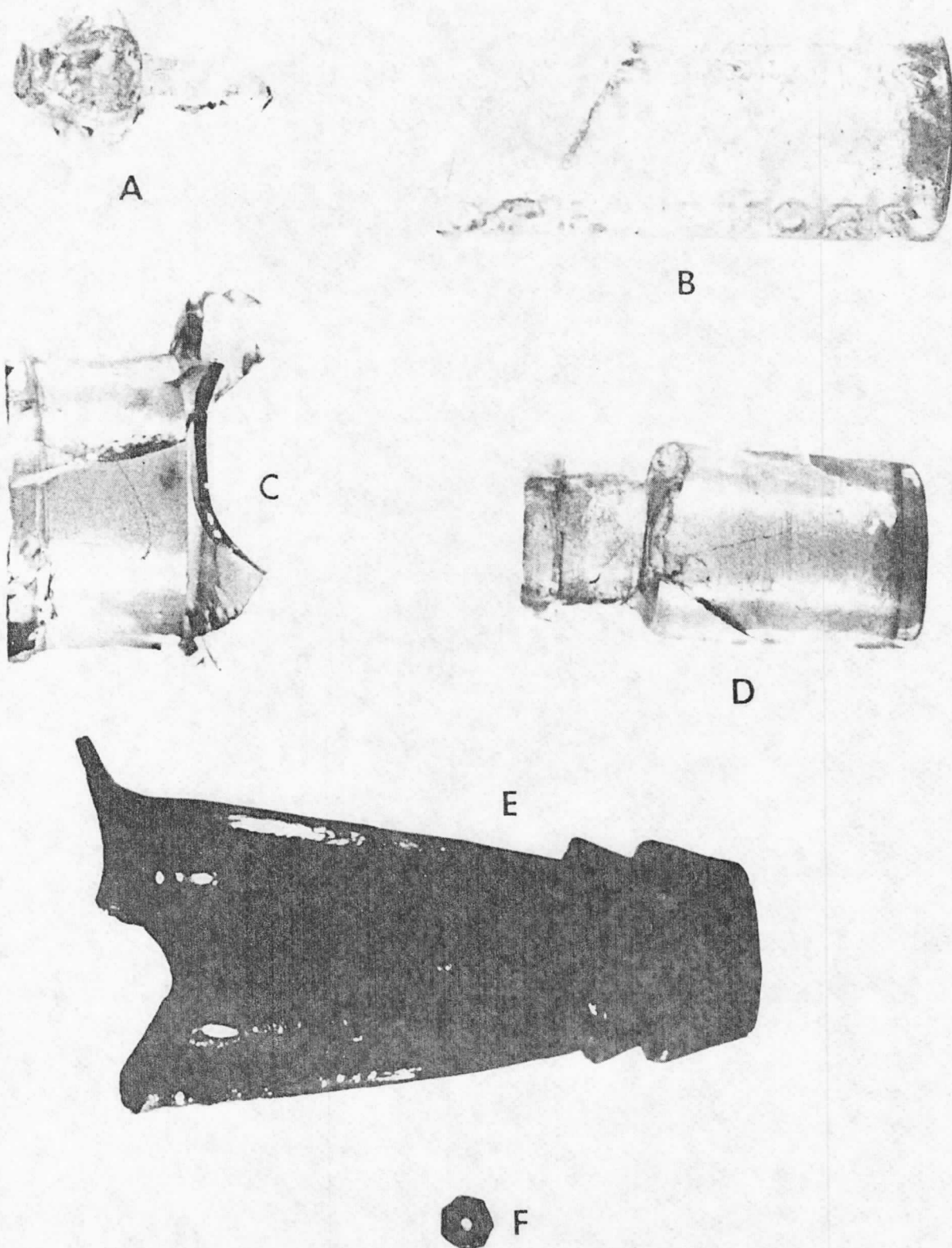
	Number of fragments
Ceramics	
Pasco plain	15
Sand tempered plain	17
Plain white ironstone	3
Metal	
Cast 4 hold "pewter" button	1
Lead balls	6
Lead fragments	2
Iron strap	8
Cut nail	3
.45 cal. cartridge	1
.410 gauge shotgun shell base	1
20 gauge shotgun shell base	1
16 gauge shotgun shell base	1
12 gauge shotgun shell base	2
Glass	
Clear window glass	9
Green glass bottle	12
Mirror	4
Clear glass bottle	2
Faceted blue bead (7 mm X 8 mm)	1
Lithic Material	
Pinellas points	2
Chert flakes	118

Table 1. Artifacts from Fort Interior and Picketwork.

tobacco (personal communication from John H. Eden, Jr., Eden Farm, Inverness, Florida, July 1975). However, it seems improbable that he would require, or could enforce, such abstinence on the part of his troops. And, even if this assumption is accepted, it would not account for the absence of percussion caps or gunflints.

More puzzling than the absence of these categories of artifacts is the failure to uncover an artifact concentration at any point along the west wall where the blockhouse was supposed to be located. Such a structure would have formed a center for activity and presumably still would be in evidence through the remains of nails, spikes, and other building hardware, along with buttons, musket or rifle balls, flints or percussion caps, and possibly wood fragments or stains (Baker 1974: 44). The absence of this material cannot be explained at this time. The site appears to have been undisturbed prior to Fryman's 1971 excavations, and the removal by Fryman of "several iron nails" along the west wall could not reasonably be expected to have destroyed all evidence of the structure (Fryman 1972: 7).

Tables 2 and 3 list the occurrences of aboriginal artifacts according to frequency and location on the site. The terms "Pasco Plain" and "Sand-Tempered Plain" refer to differences



a, Perfume or cologne bottle stopper (trash pit); b, Patent medicine bottle (trash pit); c, Jar neck (trash pit); d, Medicine bottle (trash pit); e, Wine bottle neck (south wall bastion); f, Faceted blue bead (west wall).

Plate 1. Glass Artifacts from Fort Cooper Site.