

RICHMOND HILL PLANTATION, Sterling Creek Marsh
East of Richmond Hill on Ford Neck Road
Richmond Hill Vicinity
Bryan County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2348-A

HABS
GA-2348-A

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historical American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Southeast Region
Department of the Interior
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

RICHMOND HILL PLANTATION, Sterling Creek Marsh

HABS No. GA-2348-A

Location: East of Richmond Hill on Ford Neck Road, Richmond Hill vicinity, Bryan County, Georgia.

Significance: The Sterling Marsh contains former tidal rice fields associated with the antebellum Richmond Plantation, and were also reclaimed in the 1930s during Henry Ford's tenure and used for lettuce production.

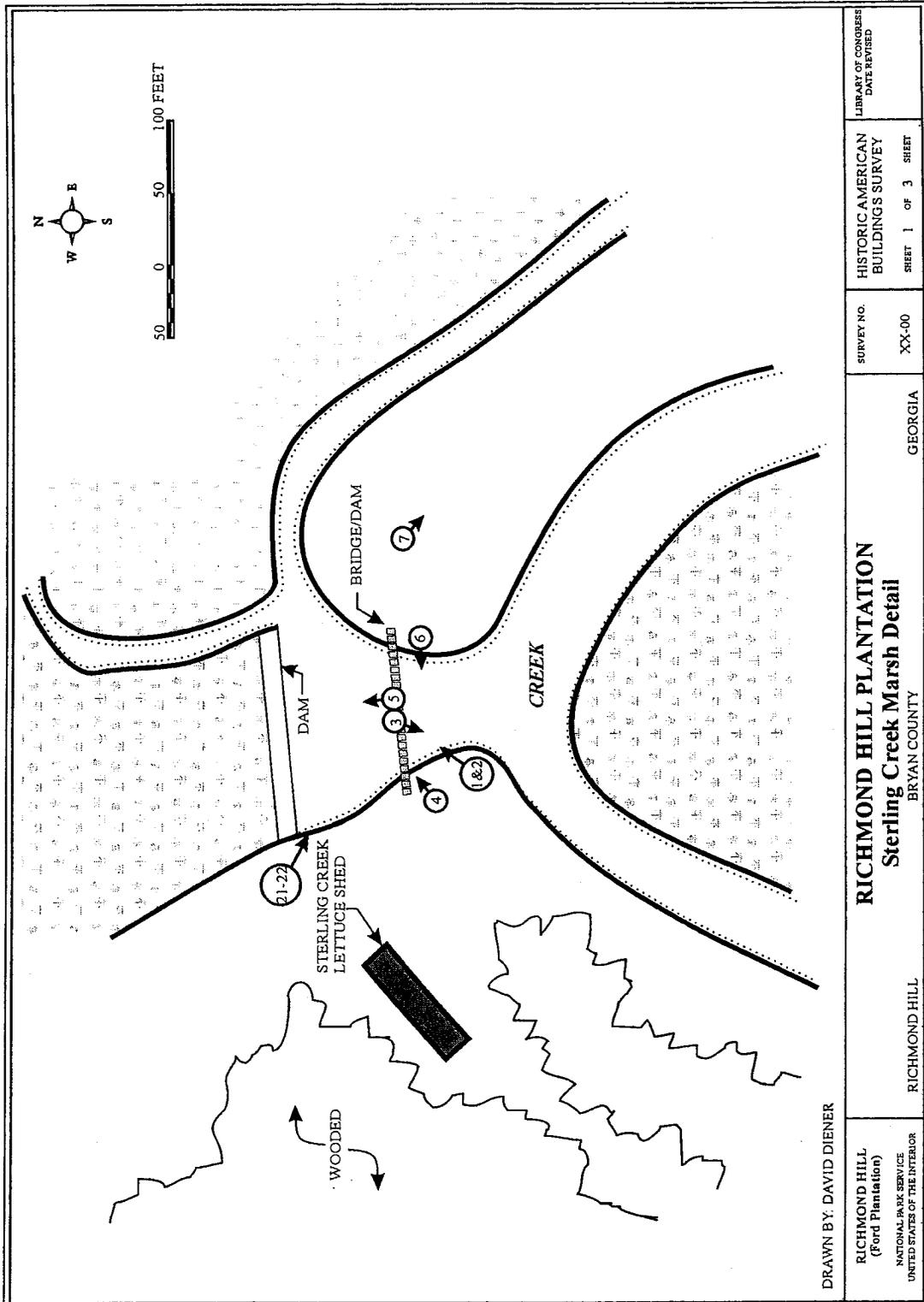
Description: Sterling Marsh consists of approximately 104 acres located in a bend of the Ogeechee River, adjacent to Sterling Creek. The marsh is a wetland surrounded by an extensive dike system. Water flows through wooden flood gates, called "trunks," which are left open and no longer controlled. The interior of the marsh is sectioned by a series of ditches and dikes. At present the marsh is unused, except as a wildlife refuge (particularly by birds).

History: The Sterling Marsh is probably the wooded swamp which the Scotsmen Hugh and William Sterling attempted to clear soon after the Georgia colony was founded in 1734. They soon abandoned their effort citing numerous difficulties. Using enslaved Africans, John Maxwell may have begun development of Sterling Marsh as early as the 1760s. In Georgia and South Carolina, a full-scale shift was made to tidal rice cultivation by the 1780s. John Maxwell's daughter, Mary Maxwell McIntosh, leased Dublin Plantation (containing Sterling Marsh) to Joseph Habersham in 1803. By this date, Sterling Marsh was probably fully developed as a tidal rice field. Dublin Plantation was sold to Thomas Clay in 1820, who changed its name to Richmond. The Clays successfully managed the plantation throughout the antebellum period, and became some of the wealthiest slave holders in Georgia. Emancipation at the end of the Civil War ultimately caused the demise of rice cultivation in the region. The labor intensive crop could no longer be grown profitably. Regardless, Joseph Clay hired freedmen and Irish immigrants to continue rice production. Sterling Marsh was used for rice until about 1890, as late as any rice field in the region. When Henry Ford purchased the property in 1925, one of his chief concerns was to find an alternative crop which could be profitably grown in the old rice fields. The dike systems at Sterling Marsh and Cherry Hill Marsh were renovated, and the acreage was used as experimental fields where many different crops were cultivated. Of scores of crops, Iceberg lettuce was found to be ideal for the old rice fields on the Ogeechee Neck. Old rice fields were restored and converted to lettuce production throughout the region, with some success. With Clara Ford's death in 1950, the Sterling Marsh once again went uncultivated.

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- Sources:** Long, Franklin Leslie and Lucy Bunce Long
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- McCaskey, Glen
1988 *The View From Sterling Bluff: From General Oglethorpe to Henry
Ford to Today*. Longstreet Press, Marietta, Georgia.
- Historian:** Scott Butler and David Diener, Brockington and Associates, Atlanta
6611 Bay Circle, Suite 220, Norcross, Georgia 30071 August 2001

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RICHMOND HILL
BRYAN COUNTY

RICHMOND HILL PLANTATION
Sterling Creek Marsh Detail

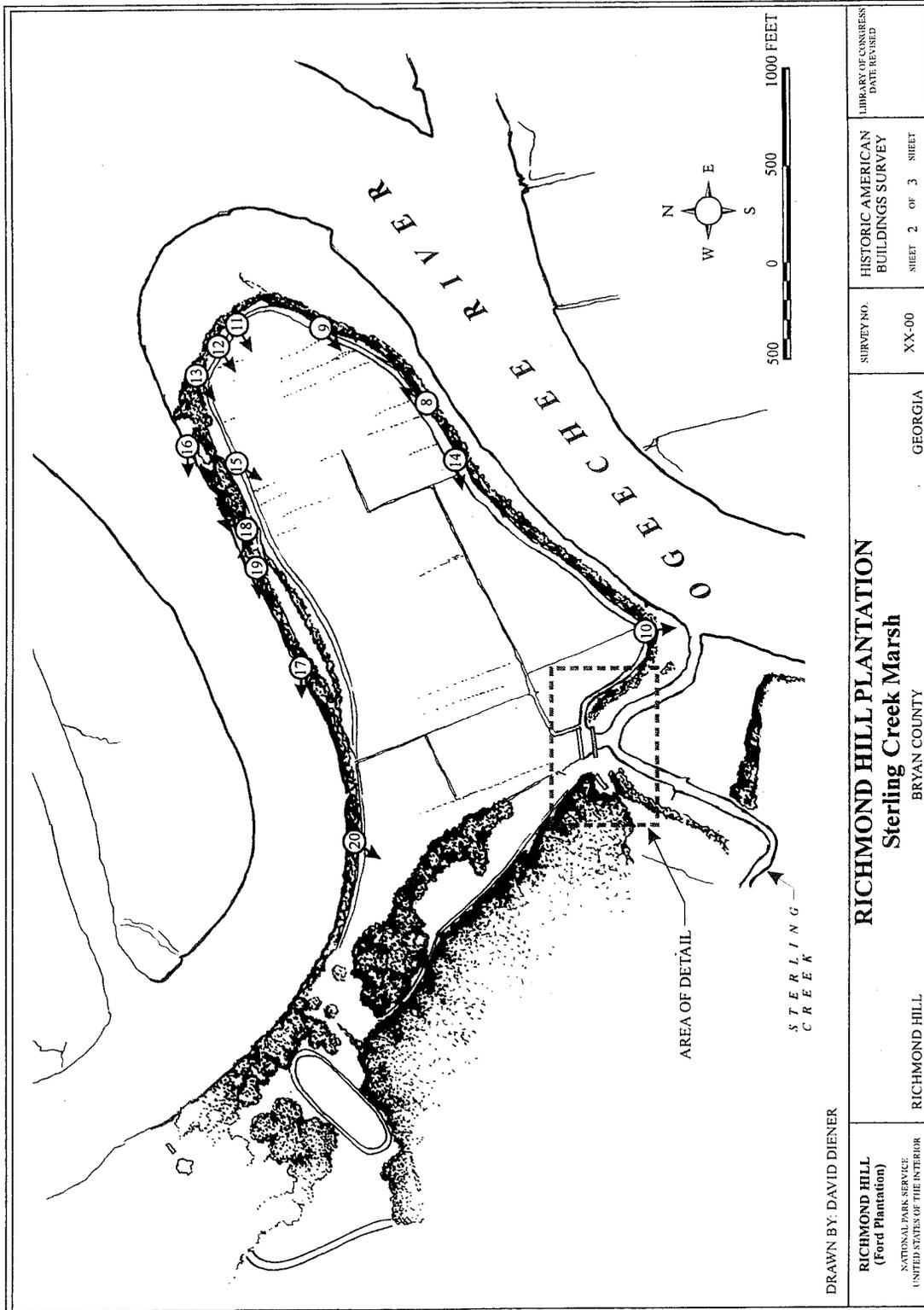
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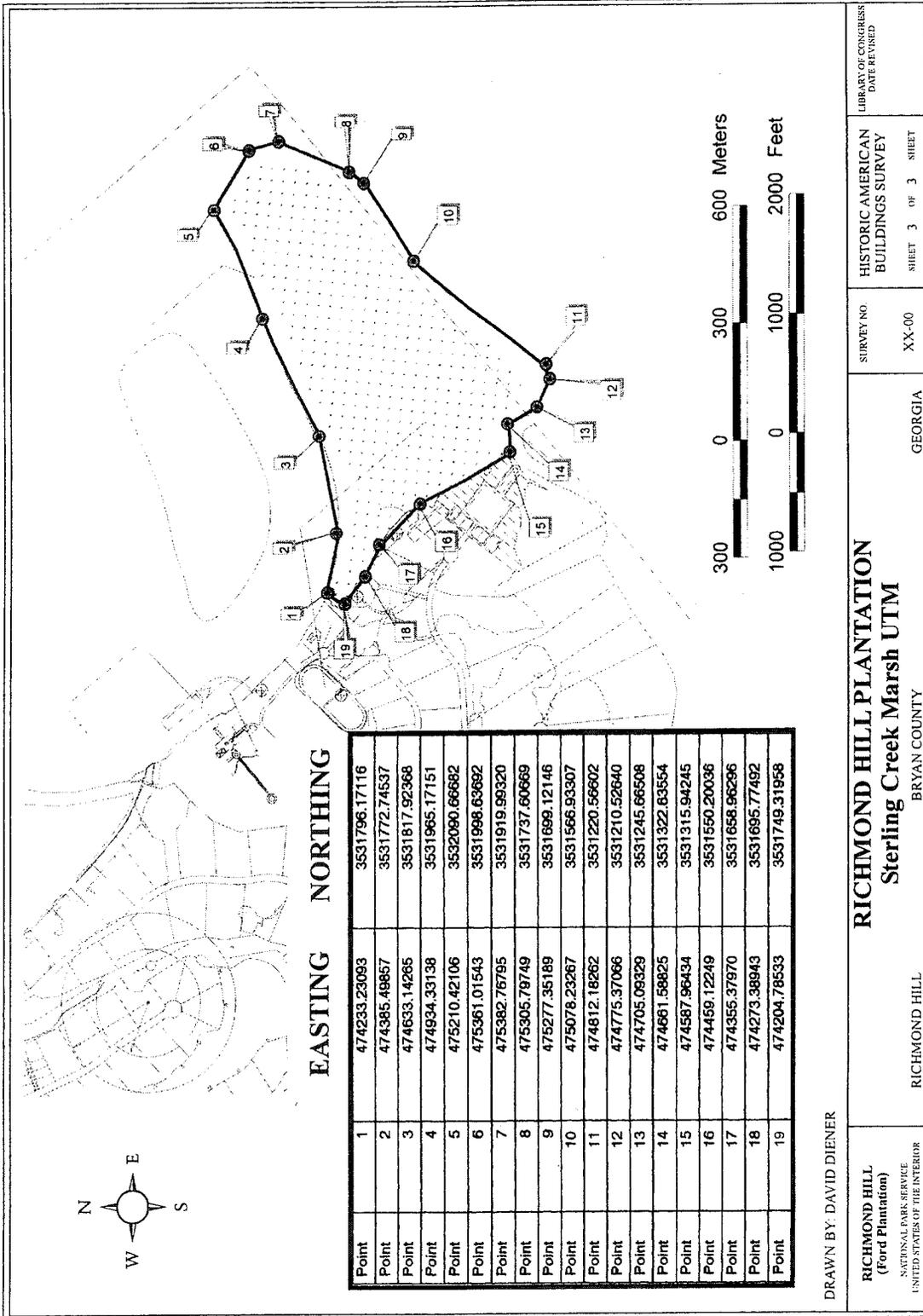
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