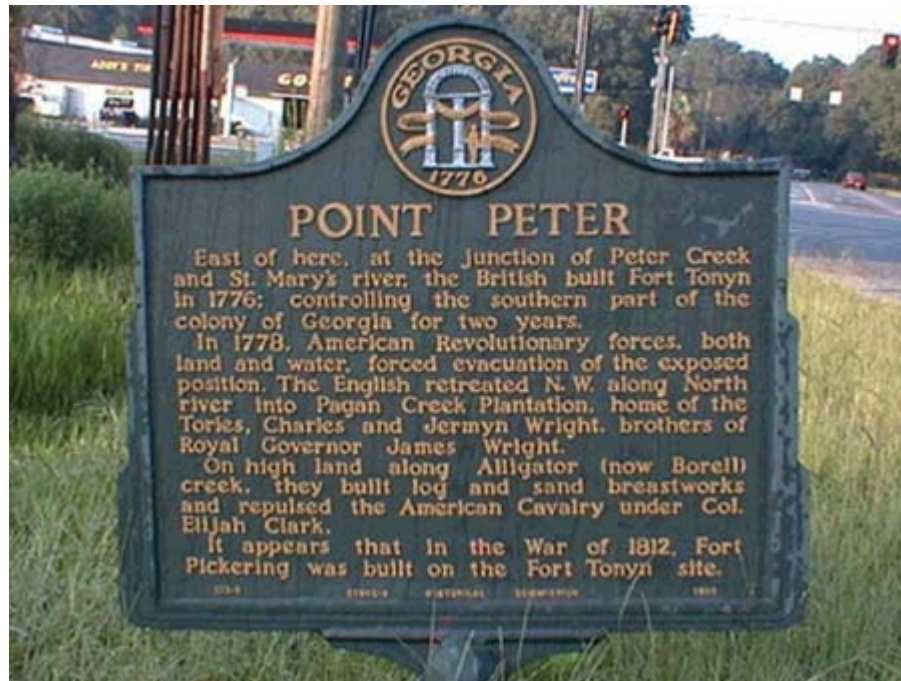


Point Peter and the St. Marys River Forts

LAMAR Institute Publication 62



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August, 2002*

Introduction

This document is a preliminary review of historical and archaeological information on pre-Civil War Forts on the St. Mary's River in Camden County, Georgia, with particular focus on the resources at Point Peter. This research was conducted as part of the LAMAR Institute's Pre-Civil War Forts Initiative, which was launched in 1999 and is intended to promote public awareness of important military sites in Georgia and neighboring states from the historic period prior to the American Civil War.

The St. Mary's River occupied an important niche during this period of history, because it was the boundary between British Georgia and Spanish Florida prior to 1763; British Georgia and British East Florida from 1763 to 1783; the state of Georgia and Spanish East Florida from 1783 to 1821; the State of Georgia and the Florida Territory from 1821 to 1845 and, between the states of Georgia and Florida thereafter. As a border, the St. Mary's River region was the scene of steady interaction between nations and states. This interaction included sporadic military occupation, irregular incursions by parties from both sides of the boundary, and a fascinating livelihood for the people who chose to make this region their home. The St. Mary's region was the scene of a regular trade in contraband and smuggled goods from international sources. This area was always on the fringe of settlement and never at the core of colony or state. This study examines the military fortifications that were part of this cultural milieu. This work is based on a preliminary review of extant historical documents and secondary histories. The work did not include any archaeological survey but it did include a review of archaeological reports on file in Athens and Atlanta.

The study area consists of the St. Mary's River drainage, which originates in Camden County, Georgia and forms the common border between Camden County and Nassau County, Florida before entering the Atlantic Ocean at St. Mary's Sound. The St. Mary's River delta, which was located at the boundary of Georgia and East Florida, was strategic turf throughout the Colonial Period, War of 1812, and 1st Seminole War period. The historical importance of this region militarily has not been fully realized by historians. The archaeological traces of this area's military past also is under-scrutinized.

Following the American Revolution, until 1821, the land immediately south of the St. Mary was Spanish Florida. The military minds of the United States government recognized the strategic importance of this location and they encouraged Congress to allocate funds for fortifications on the St. Mary's River. Most of these funds, which totaled almost \$16,000.00 was spent fortifying Point Peter. Point Peter was a point of land, surrounded by salt marsh, where a small inlet joined the St. Mary's River, less than 2 miles from the Atlantic Ocean. The need for a U.S. military post on the St. Mary's river was all but eliminated in 1821 when East Florida was ceded by the Spanish and the southern national boundary was shifted several hundred miles southward (Modern History Sourcebook 2002).

The LAMAR Institute's Pre-Civil War Forts Initiative

The LAMAR Institute Pre-Civil War Forts Initiative was designed to inventory, record, and assess military fortification sites in Georgia and adjacent states from the period prior to 1860. More than one hundred early military sites have been identified in Georgia in this program. This report is one product of this research effort. In researching the fortifications on the St. Mary's River in Camden County, numerous archival repositories were consulted. These include:

- *University of Georgia Libraries, Athens*
- *Laboratory of Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, UGA, Athens*
- *Archaeological Services Unit, Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta*
- *Georgia Historical Society, Savannah*
- *Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta*
- *National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C.*
- *Cartographic Unit, NARA, Maryland*

- *Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.*

Information is presented in the following sections on several pre-Civil War forts in Camden County, Georgia. These include Wright's Fort, Fort Tonyn, Colerain (Coleraine, or Colerain Station), Fort St. Tammany, Fort Gunn, and Point Peter. Other forts were known to exist in other parts of Camden County, Georgia, as well as in adjacent Nassau County, Florida, but these are not addressed in this study. The following information is preliminary in character and probably contains some inaccuracies that will be remedied by future study.

Wright's Fort

One of the less-documented forts on the St. Mary's River was Wright's Fort. The following information concerning Wright's Fort in Camden County was taken from "The Crypt" internet website:

Georgia was the last state to join in the War for Independence in 1775. It was then that the people renamed the area Camden County to rid themselves of the European "Parish" title. During this time, the brothers of Governor Wright of Georgia, Charles and German Wright - who were English Loyalists - built a fort on their land. The brothers built this fort, which was on the St. Marys River, in order to protect their land during the war. It is believed the fort was where Scrubby Bluff is today. The fort was named Wright's Fort. Wright's Fort became a rendezvous for the loyalists and outlaws not only from Georgia but also from North Florida. The outlaws called themselves the "Florida Rangers." They robbed many south Georgians. They would store their loot in Wright's Fort. Captain John Baker marched from Savannah in order to take care of this nest of outlaws. He failed. So did Major-General Robert Howe, commander of the American army in the Southern States. Retreating British soldiers finally burned it down in 1778. The Americans rebuilt it when they invaded East Florida, and then burned it down to prevent it falling into enemy hands. The remains were finally discovered in 1975 (The Crypt 2002).

The archaeological remains of Wright's Fort have not been identified. The location of Scrubby Bluff is known, however, and if that was the location of Wright's Fort, then this area can be the subject of future search.

Coleraine

The trading station at Coleraine was an important military post and trading station in the early Federal period. The station was owned by James Seagrove, who succeeded Benjamin Hawkins as the Indian Agent for the United States, South of the Ohio River. Seagrove owned several properties in Camden County, including land at Point Peter. Coleraine achieved national prominence in 1796, when it was the location of a major peace treaty between the Creek Nation and the United States of America. This was the second treaty between the Creeks and the U.S., the first was consummated at New York in 1790, after a failed 1789 attempt at Rock Landing on the Oconee River, below present-day Milledgeville. No archaeological sites are recorded in the vicinity of Coleraine nor has an archaeological study been conducted in this vicinity. Many historical documents have been identified pertaining to Coleraine, most in connection with its role in the Indian trade and in peace negotiations between the Creek Nation and the United States.

Fort Tonyn

Fort Tonyn was established by the British loyalists in East Florida during the American Revolution. It was destroyed by the Americans in 1778. Researchers disagree on the location of Fort Tonyn. The Georgia Historical Commission markers for Point Peter identify it as the same location of earlier Fort Tonyn. An archaeological survey of forts in Florida in the 1970s concluded that the remains of Fort Tonyn had been located on the south side of the St. Mary's river in Florida. To confuse matters further the location of Wright's Fort (another loyalist fort) was somewhere along the lower St. Mary's River as well. This question of Fort Tonyn's location remains to be fully resolved. The possibility that it was at Point Peter cannot be totally dismissed at this time.

Fort Tonyn was used as a base of operations by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Brown and the East Florida Rangers (Cashin 1989). The fort was built in 1776 or 1777. It was burned by retreating British soldiers in 1778. The Americans later occupied it as their headquarters during their 1778 invasion of East Florida and they rebuilt the burned portions. Later, the Americans completely destroyed the fort (Reddick 1976:20).

Archaeological investigation in 1975 supports the location of this fort on the Florida side of the river, near Kings Ferry (Reddick 1976:20; Bullen 1961; Boatner 1968; Ward 1975). Bullen provides a thoughtful, authoritative analysis of the historical evidence for Fort Tonyn, which places it in Florida. Fort Tonyn's location remains open to debate, however, and the possibility that it was located in Georgia cannot be dismissed. The Georgia Historical Commission's Point Peter marker, however, places the site of Fort Tonyn at the junction of Peter Creek and the St. Mary's River on the Georgia side of the river (Georgia Historical Commission 1953).

Fort St. Tammany/Fort Gunn

Fort St. Tammany defended the early federal town of St. Marys from a water attack. Fort St. Tammany was located on its southwestern edge. The town of St. Marys was established from 1787, known as New Town plantation, owned by Jacob Weed and James Seagrove (Reddick 1976:46). Oak Grove cemetery was established in 1788. In 1793 federal funds were allocated by Congress for constructing defenses in the St. Marys vicinity (*American State Papers* 1976-1997; Cooling 1979). The earliest reference to Fort St. Tammany was in 1792, when it was depicted on a map of the region (Redick 1976:25). The fort was also mentioned on June 20, 1793, when it was mentioned as a stockade for hostile Creek warriors (*Georgia Gazette* 1793). Jeff Stouf writing to Georgia Governor Mathews in 1795 mentioned a new fort at St. Mary's in 1794 (Telemon Cuyler Collection UGA). Captain Eu. Hebbard, Georgia militia, referenced a troop inspection at Fort Gunn in St. Marys in a letter to Adjutant General Augustus George Elholm, which was written on March 24, 1794. It is not clear from the evidence examined if Forts St. Tammany and Gunn were synonymous. The site of Fort St. Tammany was tentatively located by archaeological survey in 1975, when it was recorded as site 9Cm164 (Georgia Archaeological Site Files 2002). No formal archaeological excavations have been conducted at the site, however.

Many of the facts, figures, and comments in the section below on Point Peter have relevance to a study of Fort St. Tammany and Fort Gunn. Since Point Peter is the primary subject of this treatise, however, they are presented in that section.

Point Peter

The following description of Point Peter is presented in chronological order, with some exceptions. Point Peter, or Point Petre, as it was variously identified in the early Federal period, refers to the cape of land formed by the confluence of Peter Creek and the St. Mary's River (Figure 1). The earliest identified reference to this place in historical documents is a reference to 1789 elections that were held at Point Peter (Reddick 1976:5). A military post at Point Peter was established sometime after the American Revolution. Point Peter was also located on property that was granted to Jacob Weed and James Seagrove in 1787 (Reddick 1976:46). Over the next three decades Point Peter would be the site of a fort, battery, gunboat mooring, and garrison post for the United States Army, United States Navy, and Georgia militia. The magnitude and significance of this place has been muted in the historical record, largely because of the loss of documentary evidence. Early federal period records of U.S. military post at Point Peter were likely destroyed when the British sacked Washington in the War of 1812. These records would have included detailed maps and plans of the fortifications that were constructed at Point Peter prior to 1814. Ironically, it was not until 1818 when the fort was fast becoming unnecessary, that the federal government acquired title to the property at Point Peter (Reddick 1976:25).

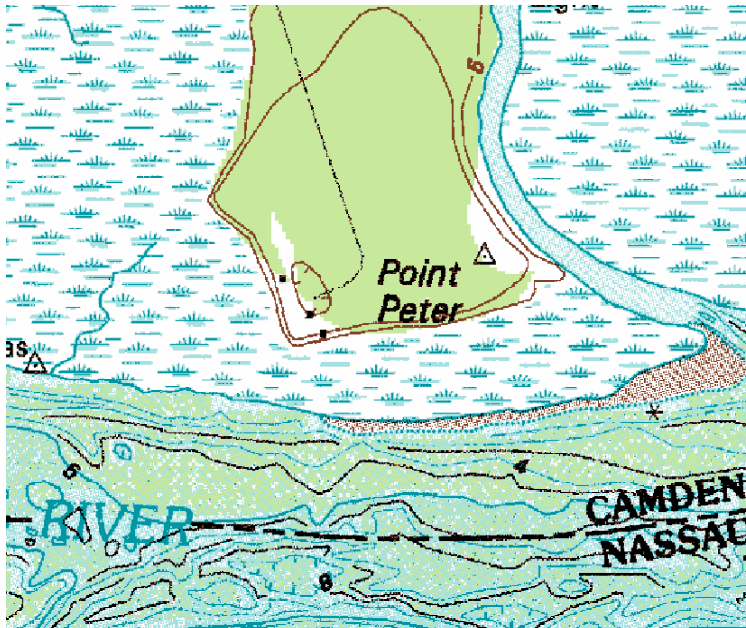


Figure 1. Modern Topographic Map of Point Peter Locale (USGS 1993).

Camden County historian Reddick (1976:26) provides this summary of the military post at Point Peter:

The military importance of Point Peter near St. Marys had been recognized prior to this time and between the years 1793 and 1805 almost sixteen thousand dollars had been spent for the fortification there. However, in 1806 a military directive ordered the removal of the garrison and suggested that St. Marys could best be defended with gunboats armed with heavy cannon and aided by a fixed battery. It was not until 1809 that plans were made for the battery and for a strong block house at Point Peter (War Dept. Records).

In 1812, the commandant at the new fortification was Lieutenant Colonel Thomas A. Smith; acting commandant was Jacint Laval; and Abraham Massias was second in command. In 1813, eight hundred reserves, available should Great Britain occupy East Florida and invade Georgia were kept in training at Point Peter. But before actual warfare, most of the troops were withdrawn and moved into other positions along the Atlantic, leaving the military force at Point Peter drastically reduced.

Early in January 1815, before the battle of Point Peter and before the occupation of St. Marys, a letter was sent to Governor Peter Early of Georgia from the inhabitants of Camden County appealing for help for this, the weakest part of the state with "a scattered population and a seaboard and frontier more extensive than any other county in the state." The governor was informed that many of the inhabitants in the county had left and others were preparing to go. A request was made for a chain of blockhouses and a competent military force. The British arrived before military assistance, and Captain Massias had a detachment of only ninety-six men to defend Point Peter.

The British forces under the command of Admiral Cockburn sailed into Cumberland South with a fleet of two ships, seven frigates, several smaller armed vessels, and nineteen barges, with both naval men and fifteen hundred British Colonial and Negro troops aboard. The British invaded Cumberland Island with one division landing at Dungeness and the other at Plum Orchard, where they occupied an abandoned U. S. Marine installation. Two days after the landing on January 13, 1815, the British attacked Point Peter, where only thirty-six men had been left to defend the fort while Massias moved across land toward Kings Bay. A line of battle was formed at a place since known as Battle Hummock, but Massias and his men were compelled to withdraw to a point near Fort Barrington on the Altamaha River. Among the thirty-six men left to defend the fort, fourteen were soon casualties so the fort was abandoned. (Vocelle and Arnow) The British then burned the barracks at Point Peter, towed away all vessels at St. Marys and occupied the town for about a week...(Reddick 1976:26-27).

Early Federal Fortifications at Point Peter

In 1794 United States acting (temporary) Engineer Paul Hyacinte Perrault was ordered to Charleston and Georgetown, South Carolina, and Savannah and St. Marys, Georgia, to establish military fortifications. Perrault was instructed to provide the U. S. War Office with copies of plans of these new fortifications. Perrault's correspondence indicates that work on the St. Marys fortifications did not commence until sometime after July, 1794. As noted, however, many of the War Office records were destroyed when Washington was invaded by the British several years later and, consequently, we have no other records of these fortification plans (*American State Papers I* 1832:101-103).

United States military expenditures on new fortifications in 1795 included \$1,423.84 for fortifications at St. Marys. The estimated cost for completion of the fortifications in St. Marys and Savannah (combined) at the end of 1795 was \$3,000.00 (*American State Papers I* 1832:106-108). Captain Jonas Fauche at Fort Gunn wrote to Georgia Governor George Mathews on November 4, 1795. Fauche refers to enclosed communications, which are no longer attached. Fauche's letter is transcribed below:

I have the honor of informing your Excellency, that Lieut. Col. Howard of the Spanish forces in East-Florida came to Newtown on the 26th ultimo; that in fort Saint Tammany in presence of the Judges of the inferior Court of Camdon, Captain Nicols of Federal Troops and myself; he declared the river Saint Mary in a State of blockade; alledging that the Province of East-Florida was invaded; and adding that there were out of Saint Augustine armed vessels for that purpose: he had with him an armed boat, with 2 Swivels and 1 sixpounders -- he also declared that none but military passports would be considered sufficient for any boats or vessels riding up and down aforesaid River, to which the magistrates consented stop here -- He communicated to us his intentions of marching up the Saint Mary with his land-forces untill he came up with the invaders -- Colo. Howard requested as a favor that I Should inform him of any military projections or movements, coming to my knowledge, and which might be attempted or effected by the revolted Subjects of His Catholick Magesty and their abettors this Side of the River, Should they recross it on his approaches; and on his part he would do the Same towards me -- The 30th ultimo I marched as high up as Temple with a Detachment of the Troop under my command, and there learnt that Colo. Howard had arrived and was encamp't over-against it, Parris'on with about 200 regular foot Troops, Some Indians painted for war and 100 militia and negreo horsemen -- I also learnt that a few days previous to Colo. Howard's arrival at aforesaid place, General Clark had changed his position and removed about twenty miles higher up the River and thence his men had dispersed -- During my Stay at Temple a friendly intercourse took place between the offices of the Spanish forces and myself, and the anexed correspondence entered into, then and afterwards.

On my return to Newtown the 1st inst. I was informed that General Clark -- Colo. Karr one of his officers together with Mr. Thos. Skrine came down and had given themselves up to the magistrates who told me they were bound over to appear to the next Superior Court in Camdon County -- On the 31st inst . ultimo two armed Schooners and one galley arrived at this place under command of Comodore McQueen and were ordered higher up the river by Colo. Howard, and on the 2d, inst. I was informed by a non-commissioned officer of the Spanish forces that

Colo. Howard had begun his retrograde march towards the outposts of His Catholick Magesty in East Florida.

By the foregoing Statement and the copies of the correspondence annexed, your Excellency will See that the object of my command here is compleately fulfilled, therefore beg leave to petition for orders to return to our former respective Forts: the men having come much unprepared, renders their Sejour here uncomfortable, besides that by the time I receive orders and am rendered to the most Northwestern Forts, their time of enrollment will be out -- I also beg leave to mention that Since the 1st of November 1794 we have not been mustered and that I am without orders or instructions for the purpose

I have the honor of transmitting to your Excellency the actual state of the Detachment under my command.... (Fauche 1795:1-4).

Captain Fauche's return is transcribed in Table 1.

Table 1. Monthly Return of a Detachment of the Troop of militia Dragoons under command of Captain Jonas Fauche, now quartered in Camdon County -- for the month of October 1795 With Casualties.

| Casualties | Captains | Lieutents | Cornetts | Serjeants | Corporals | Dragoons | Total | Horses | Remarks |
|--------------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-------|--------|--|
| Present & fit for duty | 1 | " | 1 | 3 | 3 | 36 | 44 | 42 | Document damaged |
| Sick present | " | " | " | " | " | 1 | 1 | " | Document damaged |
| Transferred to the upper Detachment. | " | 1 | " | " | " | 4 | 5 | 5 | This officer & men are now relieved by Cornet Stansson |
| Missing | " | " | " | " | " | " | " | 3 | Document damaged |
| State of the Detachment | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 41 | 50 | 50 | Document damaged |

(Fauche 1795:1-4).

A circa 1795 map of the St. Mary's vicinity identifies a structure at Point Peter downstream from the town, although it does not identify it as a fort. This map also identifies Fort St. Tammany in the upper end of St. Marys and the ruins of Fort William on the southern end of Cumberland Island (Anonymous n.d. [ca. 1815] reproduced in Smith et al. 1982:109, Figure 3-2).

Federal records note that on January 16, 1796, the "battery made of timbers filled with earth, and enclosed with pickets", in St. Marys was completed (*American State Papers I*, 1832:111). Pendleton's account of 1796 noted that the town of St. Marys was, "...defended by two forts, one of which is at Point Peter and mounts fourteen eight and twelve pounders" (Pendleton 1957:73). United States military forces in Georgia in 1796, which were divided between the Oconee River region and St. Marys, consisted of: 1 Infantry battalion, 1 Rifle battalion, 1 Artillery company, and 2 Cavalry troops. The total U.S. troop strength on the Frontiers of Georgia on March 29, 1796, was 168 rank and file, and 224 rank and file were deployed "In the fortifications on the sea coast", which would have likely included the St. Mary's River entrance. Letters to Congress dated January 20, 1796 and February 10, 1797, refers to the fortifications, " at Savannah and Point Petre, in Georgia" (*American State Papers I* 1832: 113, 116).

In a discussion on proposed military expenditures for the seacoast fortifications, James McHenry wrote on June 3, 1797, "the ports from New York to St. Mary's (Georgia) are those which stand in most need of immediate attention, more especially, in certain points of view, those on the southerly part of the line. It is, however, to be observed, that the mere augmentation, or improving the forts in that quarter will be of little utility, without the existence of regular troops to garrison them" (*American State Papers I* 1832:118). An estimated \$10,000.00 were required., "to complete &c. the works at Savannah and St. Mary's".

A summary of expenditures on fortifications at St. Mary's and Savannah from March 20, 1794 to October 1, 1799 was presented to Congress in 1800, which is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Military Expenditures for Fortifications at St. Marys and Savannah, 1794 to 1799.

| <i>Year</i> | <i>St. Marys</i> | <i>Savannah</i> |
|-------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1794 | \$1,192.73 | \$2,641.74 |
| 1795 | \$2,000.00 | \$2,000.00 |
| 1796 | \$2,000.00 | \$3,330.30 |
| 1797 | \$0 | \$0 |
| 1798 | \$0 | \$0 |
| 1799 | \$2,000.00 | \$0 |

(American State Papers I, 1832:141).

By mid-1798 the federal post at Point Peter was well established. Georgia Governor Jackson's letterbook for August 8, 1798 refers to: "the battery at Point Petre", and on October 14th of that year, he mentioned that the troops at St. Marys were sufficient for garrisoning the fort at Point Petre (Hayes 1939b).

From October 1, 1799 to December 31, 1800, another \$2,578.91 was expended by Congress on St. Mary's Georgia for "the defence of certain Ports and Harbors in the United States" (American State Papers I, 1832:153). Major Thomas Martin commanded the fort at Point Peter on August 4, 1800 (Hays 1939a:51). An estimate for expenditures, "necessary for erecting and completing Fortifications and Barracks for the year 1802" was presented to Congress and included \$6,000.00 for, "completing the works in Georgia" (American State Papers I, 1832:158). In "A Return of the Army of the United States for the year 1802, designating every post and point of occupancy", two posts are cited in Georgia, which were Fort Wilkinson and Fort Green. A total of 228 men were posted at Fort Wilkinson and 61 were posted at Fort Green [on Cockspur Island, Camden County]. None were reported at St. Mary's or Point Peter (American State Papers I, 1832:175).

A report to Congress in 1806 noted that \$2,090.38 had been expended on, "the Works" at St. Mary's, Georgia in 1801. It also provided these notes on the conditions of the U.S. military fortifications in Georgia:

On a small island called Cockspur, near the mouth of the [Savannah] river, irregular fortifications were erected in the year 1794, with a battery, magazine, and barracks [Fort Green]. In the year 1804 the works of the garrison drowned, by a storm which occasioned such a rise of the water as overflowed the island to a considerable depth; but as no cession has been made to the United States, by the State of Georgia, of any suitable site or sites, for permanent fortifications, and it not having been in the power of the Executive of the United States to procure any, on reasonable terms, either on the Savannah river or the St. Mary's, no considerable expense has been incurred on the sea coast of that State, for the last five years, and the garrison has been removed from the St. Mary's as well as from fort Green. Suitable gun boats, with some heavy cannon, on traveling carriages, would, it is presumed, afford the safest protection to Savannah and St. Mary's, aided by some fixed batteries (American State Papers I: 1832:195).

A summary account of federal expenditures for fortifications at Point Peter (St. Mary's) Georgia which was presented to Congress by Henry Dearborn on February 13, 1806, indicated that \$15,880.29 was expended from March 20, 1794 to December 31, 1805. Only two companies of U.S. troops were posted on "the frontiers of Georgia", as of December 15, 1806 (American State Papers I: 1832:197, 205). In 1806 military orders were issued to remove the garrison from Point Peter (Reddick 1976:26).

Dr. Daniel Turner was a prominent physician in the St. Marys River region and he treated many hundred cases of illness during an epidemic. Dr. Turner himself fell victim to the raging epidemic and died. The final disposition of the corpses from the epidemic are not well documented. Turner provided this description of a July 4th celebration in

1806 at Point Peter: "...We have had a very rational 4th of July feast under an awning spread at Point Petre by the citizens of town & the officers of the Gun Boats--Three of these boats are stationed here. One above, one abreast & one below town--They are very vigilant & will permit no boats from the U. States to go into Florida, except empty Spanish boats..." (Murdoch 1970:251).

A report to Congress in 1807 included this mention of recommended defences at St. Mary's, Georgia, which was considered a port of minor importance that year, "This place will require a small battery and block house, and two heavy cannon mounted on traveling carriages, aided by ---gunboats. Probable expense, _____." (*American State Papers I*:1832:220).

On July 6, 1808, Dr. Daniel Turner noted in a letter to his parents that, "We have had a very rational 4th of July feast under an awning spread at Point Petre by the citizens of town & officers of the Gun Boats--Three of these boats are stationed here. One above, one abreast & one below town--They are very vigilant & will permit no boats from the U. States to go into Florida, except empty Spanish boats--The wise Congress have, as is supposed here, unconstitutionally prohibited all our intercourse with even ports in the State..." (Murdoch 1970: 251). Unfortunately Dr. Turner died from an epidemic shortly after this 1808 letter and his informative letters about Point Peter ceased.

No records of any federal military activity at Point Peter for the years 1809 or 1810 were identified. In 1810, the War Department reported to Congress on the state of U.S. fortifications in Georgia, "Savannah.—At Five Fathom Hole, three miles below the town; a battery of masonry, calculated for eight guns. Works have not been commenced in the town of Savannah, or at St. Mary's, the title to the lands selected for the sites at those places not having been obtained". A statement of federal expenditures for fortifications for 1809 included \$26,936.74 for Savannah and \$64.09 for Fort Hawkins, Georgia (*American State Papers I*: 1832:275-276).

War of 1812 and Point Peter

The United States Navy armada in December, 1811 included 165 gunboats, which were used primarily for coastal defense. Eleven of these gunboats were stationed on the St. Marys River (*American State Papers, Naval Affairs I*, 1834:36). These gunboats, also know as "row galleys" were shallow-draft vessels that were predominately oar-powered and were used for intercoastal and river travel and were not intended for transoceanic voyages (Pederson 2002). The crew of a United States galley ship in 1798 included: 1 commander, 1 1st officer, 1 2nd officer, 1 Boatswain, and 26 oarmen. In 1811 the area with the most gunboats assigned to it was New York (20 gunboats), followed by New Orleans and then St. Marys with its 11 vessels (*American State Papers I*, 1834:36). Thus, the St. Mary's River region ranked third in the United States for requiring coastal defense on the eve of the War of 1812. Figure 2 shows a schematic diagram of a War of 1812 Row Galley, or gunboat, which served the United States Navy in Lake Champlain. This vessel measured 75 feet in length, mounted two cannons, and was powered by two lateen sails in addition to its oarmen. It is probably similar to the gunboats that plied the waters of the St. Mary's River (Pederson 2002).

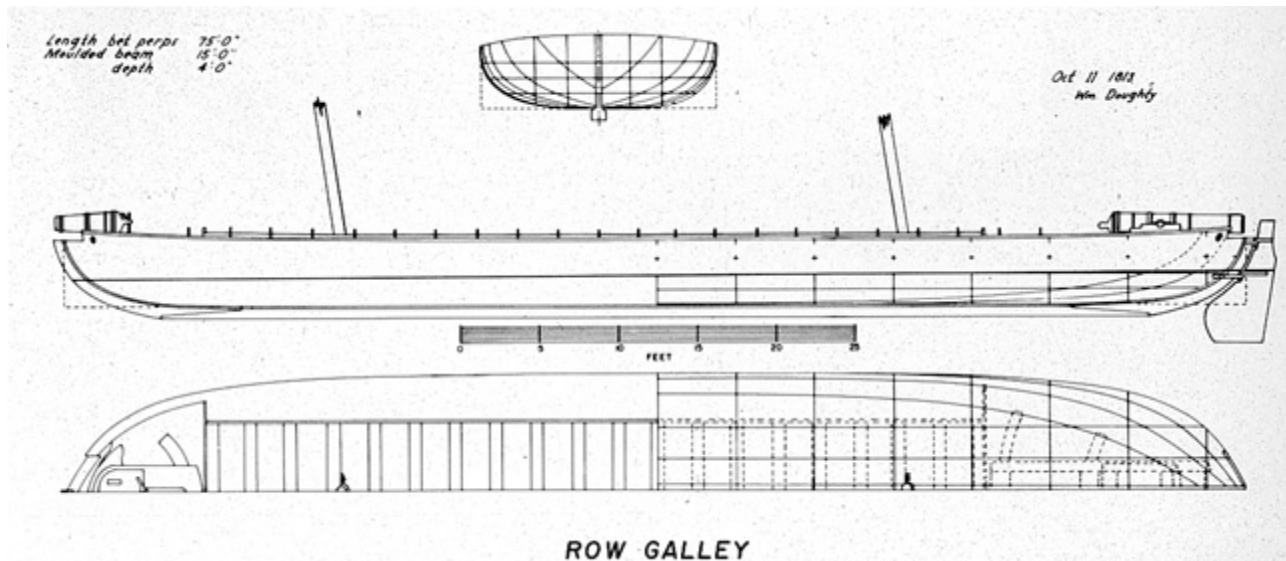


Figure 2. Schematic Drawing of a War of 1812 Row Galley or Gunboat, Lake Champlain (Pederson 2002).

A report to Congress on fortifications in 1811 listed 78 U.S. artillery troops in Georgia, who were stationed at Fort Jackson, below Savannah (*American State Papers I*: 1832:311). In 1812, 800 reserve troops were stationed at Point Peter but these soldiers were later moved to another location (Fields 2002). Reddick (1976:21) noted that the commandant of Point Peter in 1812 was Lieutenant Colonel Thomas A. Smith. The acting commandant was Jacint Laval, and Abraham Massias was 2nd in command.

On March 25, 1812, Garrison Surgeon's Mate Samuel Dusenbury was assigned duty at St. Mary's, Georgia. St. Mary's was part of the 6th military district of the United States at that time. Hospital Surgeons in the 6th District in 1813 were William McCaw, George D. Proctor, and Thomas Akin. Some of these physicians may have seen service at Point Peter. Garrison Surgeon's Mate William Ballard, who was assigned to Fort Hawkins [in present-day Macon, Georgia], is the only other officer in the Hospital Department of the 6th District in the 1813 register (*American State Papers I*: 1832:391).

A letter from G. R. Duke to Georgia Governor David Mitchell, dated September 29, 1812, concerned the drafted Militia of 1812, who formed the 1st Brigade of General John Floyd's Division. Duke reported in this letter that it included the muster roll and inspection report ordered by General Floyd. Neither of these documents has survived. Duke noted that he does not include information from the Camden County batallion, who were engaged in fighting the Indians on the frontier. Duke's letter to Governor Mitchell is transcribed:

I herewith transmit to the Executive department, the muster Roll and Inspection Return of the quota of men required by General orders from the first Brigade, commanded by Genl. Floyd except the quota from Camden County Batallion; which I have not received, owing to the duty required of them on the frontier of said County, as I am informed by Colonel Scott, that the Indians are so troublesome in that quarter that the whole of the Batallion have been on duty for some time past, by detachments But am in hourly expectation of receiving it, & as soon as it arrives, it will be forwarded to the executive department.

I also enclose to your department the receipt of Merritt & William Dilliard for the body of Meshack Burney agreeable to your Order of the 7th. May last... (Duke 1812).

A letter to Governor Mitchell, dated November 7, 1812 from an unidentified colonel in the rifle regiment garrisoned at Point Peter, provides additional information about the military post at Point Peter:

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your favour of the 13th Ulto. After consulting Genl Floyd I have determined to apprise you by express of the contents of a letter recd. from Genl [Thomas] Flournoy and to suspend active measures against St. Augustine until I am further Ordered, I will however loose no time in preparing for what I conceive must be the result. Four Companies of Colo. Chambers Regt. embarked yesterday for my Camp on the St. Johns, the remaining six will be trained here a short time before they follow. The Dons it is said by the people of Amelia intend to land five hundred men on the south point of the Island and dispossess us, they spoke also of an intention to cut off our water communication with the St. Johns by occupying the narrow passes, this they cannot effect without giving us an opportunity of resisting them on equal terms. By a Privateersman who touched at St. Augustine a few days since I learn that they have received reinforcements some stated to him five hundred others said not more than two hundred & fifty I have been informed from many sources that they expected five hundred about the 2nd. Inst. but as there was no vessels at St. Augustine by the last accounts, I do not believe they have received any reinforcements since ninety that arrived on the 10th Octr. -- The Captain Genl of Havanna has informed Govr. Kindelan that the Executive of the United States deny having any knowledge of their Troops being in the province, The Indians have remained quiet since the severe handling they met with from Colo. Newnan.

It is evident from the letter recd from Genl Flournoy that orders have been issued from the War Department that has not reached me, my friends advise me not to act offensively against St. Augustine until I apprise you of the contents of the Genls. letter as a failure would in all probability be fatal to me however judiciously it might be conducted. If you will only tell me to go on after the receipt of this letter no time should be lost in attacking the Town which was destroyed to secure the fall of the fortress -- I am anxious to receive your answer & regret that an express could not be had who would return, the bearer only being employed to deliver you this... (Anonymous 1812:1-3).

Major General Thomas Pinckney, who commanded the 6th District of the Southern Division of the United States Army in the War of 1812, established his headquarters at Point Peter by June 11, 1813. General Pinckney maintained his headquarters at Point Peter through July 15th and possibly longer. General Pinckney had appointed a hospital surgeon assigned to Point Peter, which indicates that sick and wounded soldiers were received there. By late September, Pinckney apparently had removed from Point Peter, as evidenced by the correspondence of General Floyd (Hays 1940, 3:175, 186-187). On September 22, 1813, General John Floyd wrote from his headquarters at Camp Hope to Georgia Governor William Mitchell that, "...General Pinckney never had as many as 1000 men at Point Petre" (Hays 1940, I). A November 20th letter from the Justices of the Inferior Court of Camden County noted the following about fortifications in the St. Marys vicinity: "...the inhabitants at their own expense erected two batteries one of which is covered by a stockade work at the west end of St. Mary's Street...We are credible informed that of the small force now at Point Petre, about ninety whose times of service will expire next month..." (Hayes 1940, I:201-202).

In 1815, the American Congress appropriated funds for the strengthening of military fortifications at Savannah and St. Marys, Georgia (*American State Papers* 1: 1832; Swift 1815). Another reference indicates that troops and cannons were at the fort at Point Peter in January, 1815 (NARA War Records, RG94). A circa 1815 map of the same vicinity shows a "Proposed Redoubt" in the approximate position where Fort St. Tamany was indicated on the earlier map. Point Peter is identified but not as a fortification. This map also shows the British Camp and headquarters on the southwestern side of Cumberland Island (reproduced in Smith et al. 1982:113, Figure 3-3).



Figure 3. American Privateer, circa 1812 (Ships from the War of 1812 2002).

The Crypt website provides this summary of the 1815 British invasion of Georgia:

The British sailed into Cumberland Sound in January, 1815 with a fleet of 2 ships, 7 frigates, 7 smaller armed vessels and 19 barges loaded with naval men: 1500 British Colonel and Negro troops aboard. They invaded Cumberland Island (landing and occupying both Plum Orchard and Dungeness.) 2 days later. On January 13, 1815, the British attacked Point Peter, which was held by a small force of 36 men. After 14 casualties at Point Peter, the Americans withdrew and abandoned the fort. The British burned all the barracks of Point Peter and towed away all vessels at St. Marys. They burned the American barracks and the invasion force quickly moved to occupy St. Marys. They occupied the town of St. Marys for about 1 week (Fields 2002; Vocelle 1913).

An unattributed, undated map [circa 1815), entitled, *The River and Town of St. Marys*, is on file at the National Archives (Anonymous ca. 1815). It shows British camp and Headquarters of British Forces at south end of Cumberland Island, landing place of British troops and battle ground of Jan. 13, 1815, near St. Marys. This map shows a proposed fort and symbol immediately northwest of St. Marys. Point Peter is represented by only a dot. This map also shows a battlefield up the road from Point Peter near Kings Bay.

Historical sources are in conflict as to who was in actual command of Point Peter when it was attacked on January 13, 1815. Correspondence of January 16th identified Captain Messias (Massias) in commanded, whereas another account noted that Point Peter was defended by Captain Payne, 83 men, and artillery (Hayes 1939a, 3:868). *American State Papers* Volume I:672).

Unaware that the American fort at Point Peter had been captured and burned by the British only days earlier, Major A. B. Fannin, wrote from Fort Hawkins to Georgia Governor Peter Early in Milledgeville on January 20th, discussing the arms at Point Petre (Hays 1940, 4:243). The British invasion of Georgia was short-lived, because war between England and the United States had already been terminated by the Treaty of Ghent on December 24, 1814. Consequently, the British attack on Georgia, as well as the attacks on New Orleans and Fort Bowyer, Alabama, took place after the war was officially over (Avalon Project 2002).

1st Seminole War and Point Peter

Point Peter continued to be viewed by the U.S. military as a place of strategic importance following the War of 1812. No record of the fort for the remainder of 1815 and 1816 was identified but in 1817, Point Peter emerged as an important military site at the onset of the 1st Seminole War. On August 19th, General John Floyd wrote to Governor Rabun regarding the U.S. troops who were bound for Point Petre. Floyd noted that they had not yet arrived (Hays 1940, 4:355-357). On September 5th Floyd again wrote to Governor Rabun informing him that, “on the 21st ult. a company of (U.S.) Artillery consisting of 80 men commanded by Captain Payne, arrived at Point Petre, from Charleston” (Hays 1940, 4:363-367). On November 24th, orders of the Commander in Chief [Governor Rabun] were issued by Charles Williamson, aid de camp. Governor Rabun was required by the President through an order conveyed by George Graham, Department of War, on November 12th, to furnish a force, “not exceeding

500 men...on the requisition of Major General Gaines & officer commanding at Point Peter”. Governor Rabun ordered Major General Floyd to organize a force of 500 Georgia militia for this purpose (Hays 1940, 4:369-370).

Congressional documents indicate that Captain Donoho commanded an Artillery corps, consisting of 83 men, at Fort Scott, Point Petre, Georgia in 1817. At that time Point Peter was in the 7th Department of the Southern Division of the U.S. Army, commanded by Major General Andrew Jackson. On December 19, 1817 General Floyd advised Governor Rabun that there were, “...three hundred regulars [U.S. Troops] at Point Petre” (Hays 1940, Volume IV; *American State Papers I* 1832:672). The reference to Captain Donoho at Fort Scott is the only citation identifying the Point Peter fort as Fort Scott and this identification is highly suspect. Fort Scott, on the Flint River, was a U. S. Army post that was established about this time and the federal records may be confusing the two posts. Captain Donoho and his troops may have seen service at both Fort Scott and Fort Point Petre in 1817, because the Army troops on the Georgia-Florida border were stretched thin and were expected by their superiors to defend against incursions from East and West Florida.

The following year [1818] no troops were reported at Point Peter, although congressional documents record that 222 troops, composed of the 1st and 2nd artillery battalions, commanded by Captain Payne, and 267 men, composed of the 4th Infantry battalion, commanded by Major Burd, were stationed at Ferdinandinana [Fernandina], Amelia Island [Florida]. These troops were part of the 7th Department, commanded by Brevet Major General Gaines, headquartered at Fort Hawkins, of the Southern Division. Amelia Island was Spanish territory in 1818 and the establishment of an American post on that island asserted the American’s desire to control the region. This shift in defensive strength seaward served to reduce the need for a post at Point Peter. The U.S. Government purchased the 720 acre tract including Point Peter in 1818 from Samuel Breck for \$6,000.00 (*American State Papers I*, 1832:789, 286). In 1819, a military hospital was constructed at Point Peter, under the direction of Duncan Clinch (Reddick 1976:28, 24). The fort at Point Peter remained staffed that year but its garrison did not include any sizeable force. It was not determined from the present research how long Point Peter continued as a United States military post, hospital, or gunboat wharf.

By 1821, the strategic importance of Point Peter and St. Marys was lessened as a result of the peace treaty between Spain and the United States, which resulted in the cession of Florida (Reddick 1976:28; *Modern History Sourcebook* 2002). Thereafter, Point Peter faded into obscurity to be remembered only as a topographic landmark.

An 1857 map, entitled, *Topography of Point Peter Vicinity of St. Mary’s Georgia*, was based on coastal survey conducted in 1857. This map was not drafted until 1872, however, and several versions of this map are on file—the latest was accompanied by an 1886 transmittal letter (U. S. Coast Survey 1872; Gillmore 1886). An 1862 military map of the region depicts “Pt. Peter” and the cartographer suggests ruins on the high ground just above the point (U.S. Coast Survey 1864). Apparently, Point Peter was not a significant place in the American Civil War. A portion of the 1862, showing Point Peter, is reproduced in Figure 4.

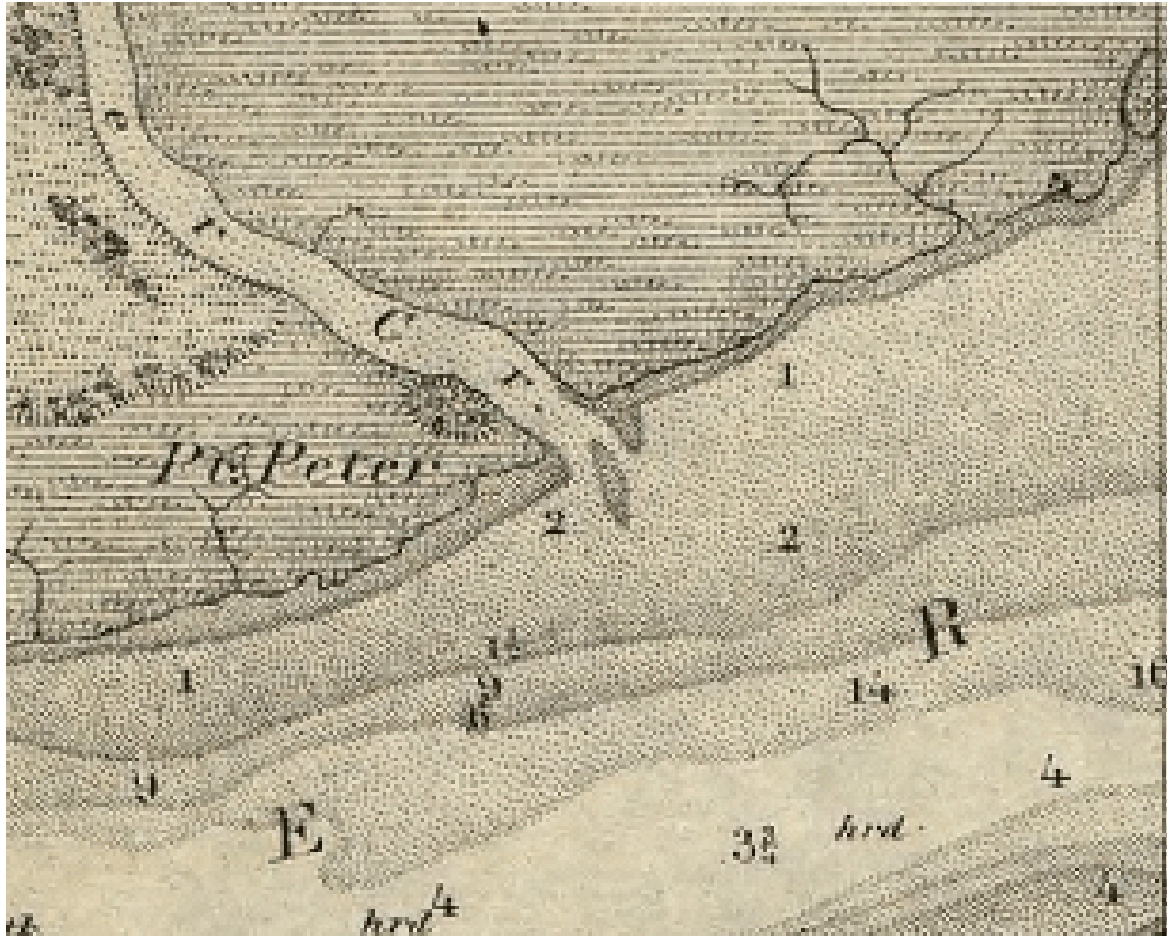


Figure 4. Detail of 1862 Map Showing Point Peter (U.S. Coast Survey 1864).

The 1872 map shows the boundary of the military reservation in detail. Point Peter is identified by a small datum triangle. The area of Point Peter is included within the military reservation. No improvements are shown and the vegetation/topography is generally indicated (U.S. Coast Survey 1872; Gillmore 1886). An 1885 map, entitled, *Survey of Pt. Peter Tract, Under Direction of Col. Q. A. Gillmore, Corps of Eng'rs. BVT. MAJ. Gen'l USA by 1st Lieut. O. M. Carter, Corps of Engineers. Assisted by A. S. Cooper, Ass't Eng'r. December 1885*, was examined. The map shows the Point Peter area in detail, shows 3 rectangular structures owned by Alex. Curtis, just east of Point Peter, no fortifications or cemetery noted. It shows a N-S road west of point peter leading to a wharf. The map shows other structures owned by Alex Curtis west of road. This map includes Appendix Y, which shows the metes and bounds of the military reservation and accompanying documents include a verbal description of the federal military reservation (U. S. Army Corps of Engineers 1885).

As noted earlier, the United States government purchased the property at Point Peter in 1818 from Samuel Brock and from then until 1870 it remained in federal ownership. In 1870 the land containing the historic fort at Point Peter was headrighted by Daniel Proctor. In 1876 Proctor sold the property to Alexander Curtis, who built a home on the land. Sometime shortly thereafter, the United States government reclaimed the property at Point Peter and held it until 1929 when it was sold to Arthur Lucas. Lucas built a lodge on the point, which was later owned by Fred Storey, a resident of Atlanta. Mrs. Storey was the daughter of Arthur Lucas. The Storey family continues to own the property (Reddick 1976:46).

Recognition of Point Peter's National Significance

Of all the military sites identified in Camden County in this preliminary study, only Fort St. Tammany has been identified archaeologically as Site 9Cm164, although no detailed study of the ruins has been conducted (Georgia Archaeological Site Files 2002). No archaeological sites are recorded on the Point Peter peninsula, nor are any archaeological surveys documented in this vicinity. The historical record of Point Peter attests to the national significance of the place, however, and of the need for an archaeological assessment of the resources it contains.

The historical significance of Point Peter was recognized early in the 20th century by Camden County historian James Thomas Vocelle, who noted: "During the war of 1812 St. Marys was invaded by the British. They landed at Point Peter Neck, where a fort had been established by the government, but the garrison consisted of only about 100 men and they were powerless against so many British. The British defeated them and then marched on to St. Marys..." (Vocelle 1913). Silva (ca. 1915:13), a resident of the area in the early 20th century, also noted the earthworks at Point Peter, and he noted that traces of the earthworks, "were yet visible". Although Mr. Silva was probably referring to a time prior to 1915 when he had last observed the earthworks, it is likely that traces of the earthworks at Point Peter remained visible at the end of the 19th century.

Murdoch gave this description of Point Peter, "Point Peter was the site of a military outpost which served also as the headquarters for the naval detachment assigned to protect St. Marys and Cumberland Island and to prevent smuggling with East Florida. Seagrove's plantation was only a mile or so from the fort and he no doubt supplied most of the victuals for the celebration as he and Major King had done in previous years" (Murdoch 1970:259).

Point Peter Cemetery

Four distinct lines of information pertain to a cemetery at Point Peter. Two are from recently compiled genealogical webpages. One is from the Camden County Crypt webpage. One is from the *Georgia Historical Quarterly* articles by Richard K. Murdoch from the late 1960s, who edited and published early 19th c. letters written by Dr. Daniel Turner (Murdoch 1969a and b, 1970). Family history information of the Jackson family identified Absolom Jackson, born about 1760 and died December 25, 1793, as an interment in the Point Peter Cemetery (Bargeron 2002). The Crypt webpage, which contains information on Camden County history, lists cemeteries at Point Peter (possibly washed away but not surveyed) and Miller's Bluff (tombstones inventoried) (The Crypt 2002). This source identified, W. M. Jackson, who died on March 12, 1791, as an interment in the Point Peter cemetery. Absolom Jackson's and W. M. Jackson's grave sites remain unverified.

Although this research was unable to locate any official statistics of illness and death from natural causes in the St. Mary's military theatre, evidence from other areas of south Georgia provide some indication of this unhealthy climate. In a letter written on March 30, 1795 by Jonathan F. Randolph to Governor George Mathews, Randolph described the miserable conditions and rampant sickness at Camp Cowpen, where a detachment of Federal troops were posted and where, "20 of which is Buried at that Place" (Hays 1940, 2:262). Soldiers posted to garrison duty at Point Peter were far more likely to die from sickness and disease than from combat wounds. The sole exception to this was in January 1815, when 14 Americans were killed in the British attack.

If one assumes a conservative average of two deaths per year in a garrison population of 80 soldiers (also a conservative estimate), then the number of dead (2.5% attrition rate, per annum) expected to occur over the roughly 25 years that Point Peter was occupied, then ***the estimated number of dead veterans at Point Peter is 50 persons.*** While some of these dead were seaman and were possibly buried at sea, most were likely interred at the Point Peter cemetery. These men died in military service to their country, yet no memorial exists for them.

Several articles by Richard Murdoch, which were published in the *Georgia Historical Quarterly* provide a strong argument in support of a cemetery at Point Peter. In his notes, Murdoch wrote:

A personal search of Oak Grove Cemetery in St. Marys and the old burial ground at Point Peter confirms reports that there are a large number of graves dating from the beginning of the

nineteenth century that have fallen into complete disrepair and are unidentifiable. Most of the bodies have been removed from the Point Peter burial ground but there seems to be no indication as to where the human remains were taken. Many of the earliest stones in the Oak Grove Cemetery have fallen to pieces or have been smashed or removed by vandals. There are obvious signs that several mounds were once graves with stones long since gone or possibly never covered by a stone.... (Murdoch 1969a:390).

In 1953 the Georgia Historical Commission erected a historical marker to commemorate Point Peter and the text of this bronze plaque is transcribed below:

POINT PETER

East of here, at the junction of Peter Creek and St. Mary's river, the British built Fort Tonyn in 1776; controlling the southern part of the colony of Georgia for two years.

In 1778, American Revolutionary forces, both land and water, forced evacuation of the exposed position. The English retreated N.W. along North river into Pagan Creek Plantation, home of the Tories, Charles and Jermyn Wright, brothers of Royal Governor James Wright.

On high land along Alligator (now Borell) creek, they built log and sand breastworks and repulsed the American Cavalry under Col. Elijah Clark.

It appears that in the War of 1812, Fort Pickering was built on the Fort Tonyn site.

020-8 GEORGIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION 1953 (CVIOG 2002).

Historical records indicate that Point Peter contained the following resources:

- *battery*
- *heavy artillery*
- *blockhouse*
- *barracks*
- *hospital*
- *cemetery*
- *mooring for 3 to 11 gunboats*
- *associated occupational debris*

Most recently Point Peter (Peter) was recognized by the National Park Service, American Battlefield Protection Program as an important War of 1812 battlefield (NPS, ABPP 2002). Undoubtedly, important archaeological remains are located at this site and a survey investigation should be mounted. The USGS GNIS database locate the cape of Point Peter in Camden County, Georgia at Latitude: 30 degrees 43 minutes 35 seconds N, Longitude: 081 degrees 30 minutes 55 seconds W (USGS, GNIS 2002) (Figures 5 and 6).

Development Threat

A portion of the Point Peter peninsula is already developed as multi-unit residential housing. A major development plan threatens the historical resources at Point Peter (Land Resource Companies 2002; Privett and Associates 2002). The proposed development alternatives (Concept A and C) will heavily impact the vicinity of the U.S. Army fort, hospital, and cemetery at Point Peter. Planned development at the area suspected of containing the archaeological remains include construction of Point Peter Boulevard and Point Peter Square (which includes a multi-unit residential housing, a lake, a club house, commercial buildings, a boat pier, and parking areas). A small area on the western side of the point will be retained as the residence of the Storey family. This area is identified as an out-

parcel on the proposed development maps. Hopefully, these plans can be amended to consider the impact on the archaeological remains of this historical locality.

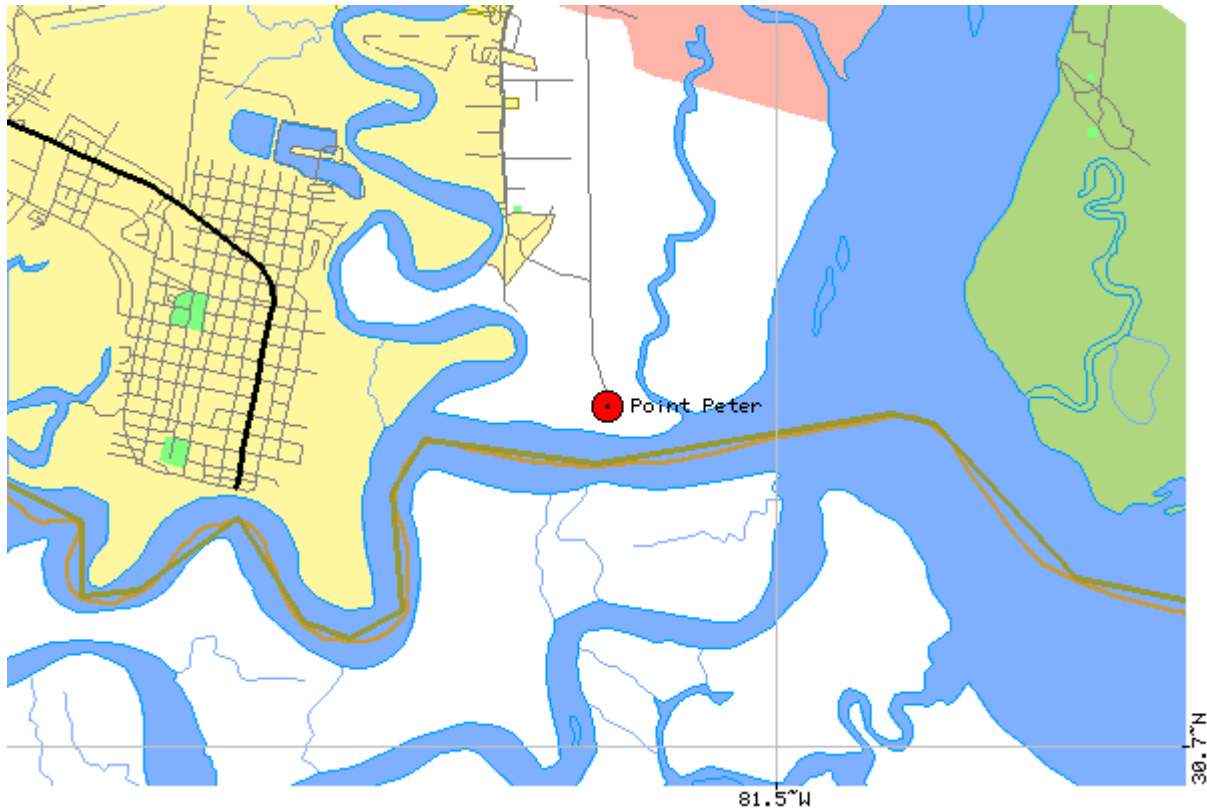


Figure 5. Approximate Location of Point Peter, Camden County, Georgia (U.S. Census, Tiger Mapping 2002).

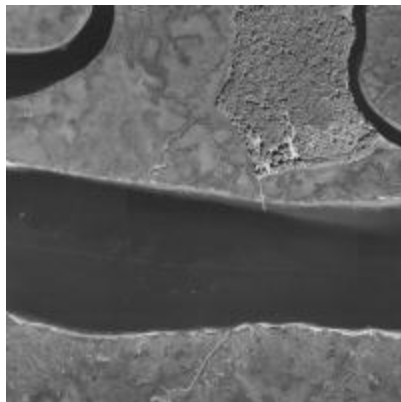


Figure 6. Aerial View of Point Peter, 1999 (Terraserver 2002).

Point Peter Summary

Historical records, which were summarized in the previous section, indicate that a military post existed at Point Peter from 1794 until 1819. Point Peter served as both an Army and Navy post and its garrison strength ranged from total abandonment to below 1,000 soldiers in mid-1813. In June and July, 1813 the Army post at Point Peter served as the 6th District Headquarters for the Southern Division of the United States Army. In January 1815 the British attacked and burned the American fort at Point Peter, but it was soon rebuilt and by 1817 it contained a garrison of

about 500 Georgia militiamen and 80 U.S. Artillery troops. The need for a military post at Point Peter was removed when the Spanish ceded East Florida to the United States in an 1819 treaty. By 1821 the military force was apparently withdrawn and Point Peter fell into disrepair. Periodically however, the United States military returned to assess this strategic military location and for several decades it was part of a military reservation. Point Peter was a vital military post in the War of 1812 and the 1st Seminole War, and it was an important post in the unsettled years of America's youth, following the American Revolution. Point Peter is one of several important military posts in the St. Mary's River region identified in this paper. Present development plans threaten the remaining resources at Point Peter, which probably include an abandoned United States military cemetery. Consideration of these potential historical resources in the pending development plans is strongly urged.

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