

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED DEC 20 1977
DATE ENTERED JAN 30 1978

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Richmond Hill Plantation

AND/OR COMMON

Ford Farms; Henry Ford Plantation

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Ford Neck Road (P. O. Box 317)

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Richmond Hill

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1st - Ginn

STATE

Georgia 31324

VICINITY OF

CODE

13

COUNTY

Bryan

CODE

029

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

BEING CONSIDERED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

NO

MILITARY

OTHER: vacant

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

George P. Tobler and Henry Ford Plantation, Inc.

STREET & NUMBER

139 East Main Street, Box 608

CITY, TOWN

Smithtown

VICINITY OF

STATE

New York 11787

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Bryan County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Pembroke

STATE

Georgia

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Bryan County Survey

DATE

October 15, 1975

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR

SURVEY RECORDS Historic Preservation Section, Department of Natural Resources

CITY, TOWN

Atlanta

STATE

Georgia

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The principal or river facade of the Ford mansion at Richmond Hill faces north on the Great Ogeechee River. The land approach from the south is along an oak lined avenue which interlocks at the house site in a "T" formation with another oak avenue. A third avenue, parallel to the avenue near the house, completes an "I" configuration with formal gardens on either side of the direct approach to the house.

The house was constructed in 1936 from a design remotely inspired by the Greek Revival Hermitage Plantation on the Savannah River from which the bricks for the Ford House were salvaged. However, the similarity is distant with the Ford mansion borrowing from a number of styles for details handled in an eclectic manner such as the Federal-inspired entrance door with leaded-glass fanlight.

Projecting from the south or land facade is a central two-story portico with continuous columns spanning two stories. The wooden columns are designed in the temple of the winds order and support a wide entablature with parapet above. The parapet in wood on the porch continues in brick around the rest of the house giving the appearance of a flat roofline. The portico is approached by a short flight of steps, the principal floor being but a few feet off the ground. A door directly above the central entranceway gives access to the porch from the second floor level. This door is trabeated with rectangular transom.

Pilasters continuing two stories stand at the rear of the portico, one on each end. They repeat the temple of the winds motif of the four main columns. Flanking either side of the pilasters on the first and second stories are a pair of windows 6/6 lights. Four more similar windows complete the central portion of the south elevation and are repeated at the second story level. The river facade is identical.

The eastern and western portions of the house are octagonal and set back a few feet from the front and rear facades.

On the interior a large central hall runs from the land side to the river side of the house. A straight run of stairs rises on the west wall of the hall. To the left of these stairs on the first floor is the main drawing room extending the full length of the house. A fireplace exists on the east wall of this room. The east wing contained the dining room, pantry, and kitchen. The dining room has a chairrail and carved corner cupboard.

The pantry is directly to the north of this room connecting the dining room with the kitchen. The proportion and appointments of these rooms are extraordinary. The counters and fixtures are all stainless steel and of commercial quality. Huge iceboxes and stoves are in the kitchen as well as storage pantry. A latticed porch and stoop extend to the east of the kitchen.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1936 (1925-1951) BUILDER/ARCHITECT Cletus Bergen

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The site of Henry Ford's plantation at Richmond Hill is significant in as many fields as Ford's diversified interests led him. His endeavors at Richmond Hill spanned the fields of agriculture, industrial development, education and social and humanitarian activities.

Henry Ford first became interested in the rural community of Ways in Bryan County, Georgia, in 1925. For the next two decades Ford attempted to develop, through his experimental farm, a diversified but balanced system of agriculture in the deep South. Much of his philosophy regarding the interrelatedness of industry and agriculture found its physical manifestation at the Ford Farm in Bryan County.

In 1938 he was quoted in the Savannah Morning News: "So many young men come out of high school and college with abundant booklearning, but lacking in ability to apply themselves. I am convinced we should start our youth at an early age on a program of practical training which will lead directly into positions following graduation.

"Industry has every facility for technical training, and should take the initiative in offering such instruction, as a supplement to general schooling.

"Students ought to be taught to use their hands as well as their heads. Mechanical training would serve even a doctor in good stead. They should also learn by tilling the soil, where our real wealth springs from."

According to news articles of the time, Ford believed people should be taught how they might make country life attractive on a small income; and, in this way, home life would be enriched and they would want to remain there.

In 1936 Ford built a winter home on the site of Richmond Plantation on the Great Ogeechee River. The original home, rice mill, and slave quarters had been burned by Sherman during the Civil War. The house Ford built was first known as Ford Farm; but later, in 1939, the name was changed to Richmond Hill Plantation in honor of the original house. At their full extent, the Ford holdings totaled over 85,000 acres.

The house was located near a station along the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad which was laid through the area in 1856. It was the custom at the time to name the stations along the railroad for prominent families and hence the name Way Station. In 1941, the name of Way, Georgia, was changed at Ford's request to Richmond Hill.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Savannah Morning News, 1936-1943, Microfilm at Savannah Public Library
 Burlingame, Roger. Henry Ford, Alfred A. Knopf, New York: 1955. Paperback edition published by Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Company, New York: 1970.
 Lewis, David. Ford at Richmond Hill, and article from Cars and Parts, September, 1973.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 60

QUADRANGLE NAME Richmond Hill, Georgia

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 1,7 | 4,7,3 | 8,6,0 | 3,5 | 3,2 | 2,8,0

B 1,7 | 4,7,4 | 2,2,0 | 3,5 | 3,1 | 8,1,0

ZONE EASTING NORTHING 560

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C 1,7 | 4,7,3 | 9,4,0 | 3,5 | 3,1 | 6,0,0

D 1,7 | 4,7,3 | 5,2,0 | 3,5 | 3,1 | 9,9,0

E | | | | |

F | | | | |

G | | | | |

H | | | | |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at a point beyond the extension of Brisbon Road where the line would intersect the Ogeechee River, move south westerly along that line for 1500 feet;

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Beth Lattimore Reiter

ORGANIZATION

Historic Preservation Planner

DATE

September 27, 1977

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 8301

TELEPHONE

236-3527

CITY OR TOWN

Savannah

STATE

Georgia

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE X

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Elizabeth A. Lyon

12/9/77

TITLE

Acting State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Wm. H. ...

DATE

1/20/78

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

William H. ...

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

...

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Between the entrance hall and the dining room is a small hall off of which is an elevator and closets. There is a bath on the river side.

Six bedrooms and seven baths make up the second floor plan.

The Ford mansion was centrally heated from a power plant located at the laboratory about 1,000 feet from the house. A tunnel connects these two buildings, the tunnel housing the copper pipes which brought the steam heat to the main house.

The laboratory is a one and a half story masonry structure also known as the old rice mill. The original lab was destroyed by fire and the present one erected in the late 1930's. Ford maintained an office in an upstairs room in his lab. Ford engines and boilers are still in place in this building along with other machinery.

Another structure near the house is a wooden servants house and laundry. It is very neat with fireplaces and wood mantels and also appears to have been built in the 1930's.

Two camellia gardens flank either side of the approach to the land side of the house; however, they are much overgrown and no walkway pattern can be made out, at least not in the summer. A broad lawn stretches down to the river's edge on the river side.

The present condition of the house is much deteriorated. The steps have rotted away and bees are digging into the columns. The leaded-glass windows are broken in many places and the house is open to the elements and vandals. Clogged roof gutters have caused noticable damage to ceilings and walls; and the humidity has caused all the wallpaper to leave the walls, including the scenic wallpaper which had hung in the dining room. The exterior hardware, including the shutter hooks, is solid brass; but some of these are missing.

Henry Ford's holdings in this area of Georgia at one time included several contiguous plantations. The boundaries for this nomination have been drawn so as to include the high ground, set off from surrounding marshes by trees and other foliage, which provides the setting for the main house and out buildings mentioned above.

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When Ford arrived, he found fallow farm lands, rice fields reverted to marshes, mosquitoes, and malaria. He opened a clinic and virtually eradicated the disease from the area.

Ford lived at his home during the winter months. During these years, Ford became very interested in chemurgy, the industrial use of agricultural products. This interest led him to meet George Washington Carver in 1938, chief of research and experiment at Tuskegee Institute, who had devoted his talents to the development of new uses for products of the soil. From 1936 on, a lab on Ford's property was devoted to research in plastics and products from soy beans, among other things. Roger Burlingame writes in his book Henry Ford that "his experiments with plastics and fiber made from soybeans were said to be costly and the whole project was given up by Henry II, but in the mid-1930's a bushel of soya went into every Ford car."

Ford engaged in social and humanitarian endeavors to improve the life of the residents around his home, both black and white. Seventy-five percent of the people near his farm were black; and, for these people, he built a negro grammar and high school (1939), a machine shop, and set up night classes for adult negroes. He bought buses to bring the rural negro children in to school from outlying areas. He named the black school the George Washington Carver school in honor of the famed negro scientist whom he had gone to see at Tuskegee. The Savannah Morning News commented in 1939 that "the manufacturer...announced an educational program for both negroes and whites at his Ways Plantation which combined the making of certain small automobile parts, farming, and study."

In 1936 when Ford began construction on a large saw mill, most of his 85,000 acres was in timber. Ford's saw mill ran with the coordination of an automobile production line. Magazine articles tell of cypress, oak, and pine logs which went in at one end and emerged at the other as cut shingles, siding, and framing cut to specifications and ready to assemble into houses with no further sawing. He developed a Ford farm house prototype, many examples of which are still standing at Richmond Hill, on a production system whereby they could be hauled anywhere in the South and put up by Ford carpenters complete for \$2,500. The work was done under the auspices of the industrial school to give practical training to the men in the community. Those houses erected at Richmond Hill were built not to attract new residents but to house the estimated 700 persons participating in the work of his community.

In 1939, Ford built a chapel, which is still standing, for the school children who attended each morning. It is similar in appearance to the Martha-Mary Chapel in Greenfield Village in Michigan and was known by the same name in Richmond Hill. Now the church is owned by St. Ann's Catholic Church.

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Ford firmly believed that a back-to-the-farm movement would precede a new era of prosperity in the United States. He felt that there was a need for a low-cost tractor; and, in 1937-38, he tested two models at the Richmond Hill farm. The Savannah Morning News in January of 1939 wrote "Henry Ford, who believes any lasting general prosperity is closely allied with the prosperity of the soil, hopes to see his dream of more intensive farm production brought a step nearer realization with the introduction in the near future of his low-cost tractor."

His vocation agricultural work progressed into the 1940's. At the Richmond Hill School the projects consisted of hogs, chickens, oats, and winter peas; cover crops included Austrian peas, vetch, and crimson clover; truck crops consisted of tomatoes, black eyed peas, cabbage, onions, roasting ear corn, and sweet potatoes. The men learned trades at the carpentry and machine shops which would be useful on the farm.

In 1941, Ford drained the old rice fields near his house, restored the dikes, and installed new flood gates. He planted iceberg lettuce which thrived in the rich soil.

Ford oversaw this activity during the winter months from his mansion and gardens near the settlement of Richmond Hill. Nearby was a structure known as the rice mill and laboratory where he kept an office and the machinery which heated his home. This building is extremely significant today for the machinery it still houses. He planned to set up a cotton gin on the plantation and bought the old gins from men in Beaufort, South Carolina. There are pieces of equipment in the laboratory which seem to pertain to cotton and rice.

Henry Ford died in 1947. His grandson, Henry Ford II, did not pursue the projects which had so engrossed the elder Ford. Support for the program was terminated in 1951; and the plantation house, farm equipment, and village with 170 houses was sold to a New Hampshire industrialist, Gilbert Verney, who, in turn, sold the house in 1959 to Mr. and Mrs. James McCook. In 1961, the estate was sold to a group of four area businessmen; and finally, in 1969, it was sold to the present owner, George P. Tobler.

"Henry Ford...believed that by developing to the fullest the resources of a land and the talents of its people, over a period of years there can be built up a self-sustaining community, rich not alone in material things, but in culture."
(unsigned magazine article, verticle files, Savannah Public Library)

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His aim was the development of industry in conjunction with agriculture with the factory utilizing the products of field and forest. At Richmond Hill he put his theory into practice and, for a generation, helped people to help themselves.

Today, Richmond Hill stands directly in the path of the expanding influence of Savannah. Already it serves as a bedroom community for the city with much of the timberland being converted into housing developments. Ford's influence and experiments at Richmond Hill are but a memory. Only the physical buildings remain revolving around the handsome mansion on the Great Ogeechee River. The winter home of this great industrialist should be restored along with the gardens and the oak-lined avenues. Enough land should be preserved with the mansion to protect its views from the encroachment of tract housing which is being developed nearby. The lab and its machinery would be of special interest to historians and American engineering and is a worthy restoration project in itself.

Though only 41 years old, the mansion itself is built with the care and exactitude which will make it notable in future generations. The workmanship and materials are exceptional, which is attested by the fact that the house has withstood several decades of neglect and exposure to the elements. Its preservation will have meaning not only in industrial history but also in the development of America's cultural heritage.

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Boundary
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from that point then move southeasterly for 2000 feet to a point where this line intersects a light duty road; from this point move northeasterly to the Great Ogeechee River; and thence northwesterly along the river to the starting point.

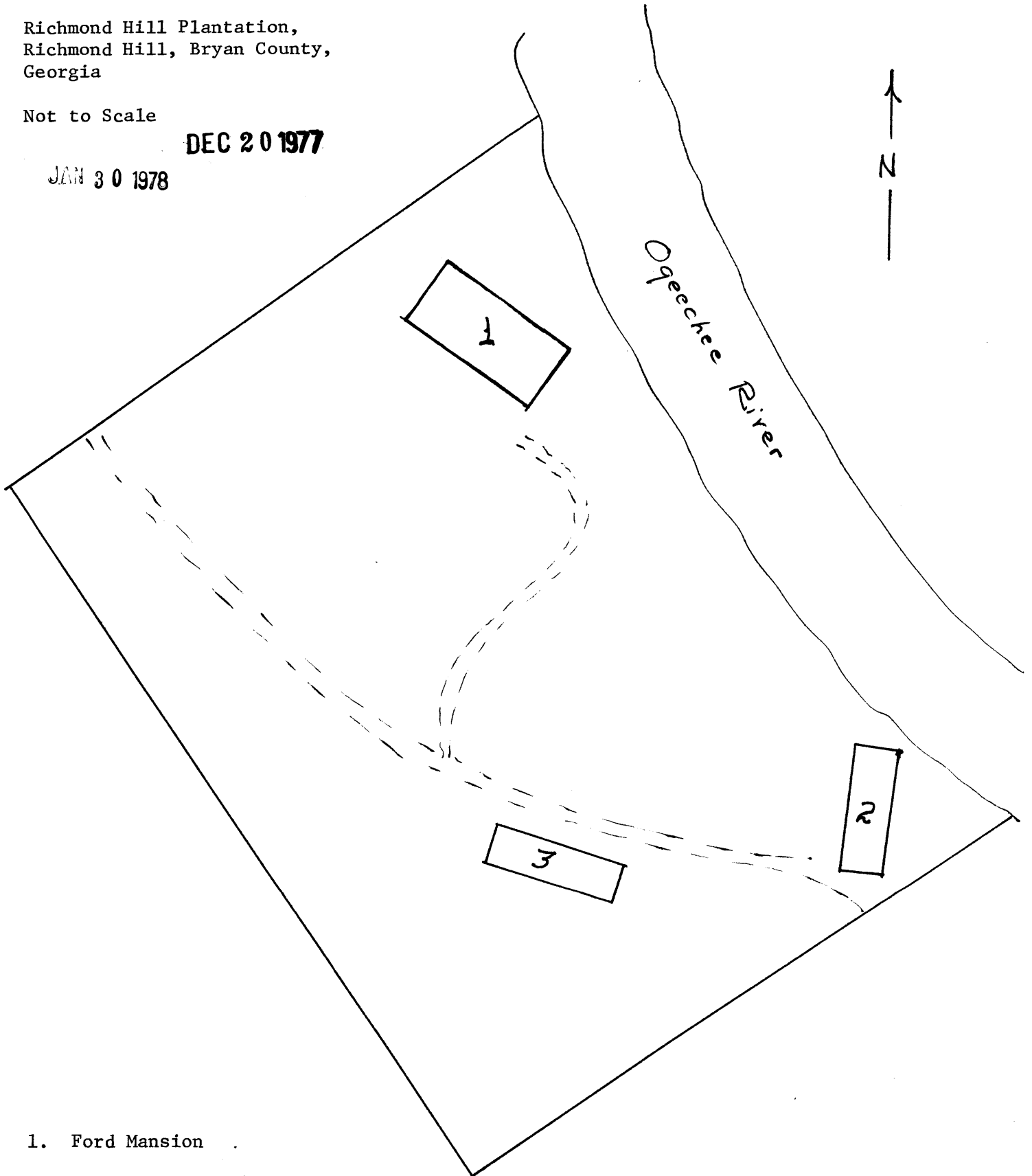
SKETCH MAP

Richmond Hill Plantation,
Richmond Hill, Bryan County,
Georgia

Not to Scale

DEC 20 1977

JAN 30 1978



1. Ford Mansion
2. Laboratory and engine room
3. Servants quarters