

PH0023272

STATE: Georgia
COUNTY: Liberty
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE: JUN 18 1973

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

### 1. NAME

COMMON:  
Woodmanston Site (Le Conte Plantation)

AND/OR HISTORIC:

### 2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: SW of Riceboro  
Off Barrington Road

CITY OR TOWN: Riceboro Ga. CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: 1st - Bo Ginn

STATE: <u>Georgia</u>	CODE: <u>13</u>	COUNTY: <u>Liberty</u>	CODE: <u>179</u>
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### 3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ _____
		<input type="checkbox"/> Comments _____ _____	

### 4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: C.B. Jones Estate (leased to Brunswick Pulp and Paper Company)

STREET AND NUMBER: P.O. Box 1438 (Brunswick Pulp and Paper)

CITY OR TOWN: Brunswick STATE: Georgia CODE: 13

### 5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Liberty County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Hinesville STATE: Georgia CODE: 13

### 6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

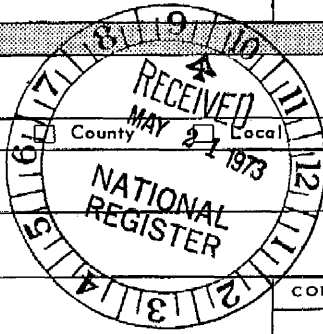
TITLE OF SURVEY: None

DATE OF SURVEY: \_\_\_\_\_  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

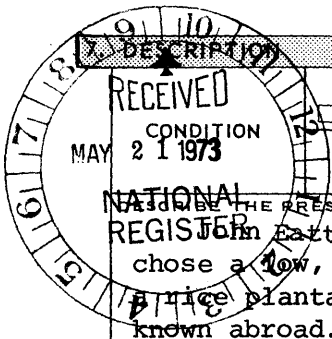
CITY OR TOWN: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ CODE: \_\_\_\_\_



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: <u>Georgia</u>	COUNTY: <u>Liberty</u>
ENTRY NUMBER: <u>JUN 18 1973</u>	DATE: <u>JUN 18 1973</u>

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DESCRIPTION		(Check One)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
(Check One)			(Check One)		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered			<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		
			<input type="checkbox"/> Moved		
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

John Eaton LeConte, Sr., a winter visitor to coastal Georgia, by 1770 chose a low, wet area inland from the tidal marshes specifically to develop a rice plantation. His son later developed a botanical garden which was known abroad. Today, there remains good physical evidence for the rice venture, but only one camellia tree from the garden which was a nature laboratory for a family of scientists. Two palm trees indicate the area of the main house, but thorough archaeological exploration would be necessary to reconstruct accurately the full plantation.

The senior LeConte started his rice plantation in a section of Bull Town Swamp about a fourth of a mile wide and three miles long. On early maps, Bull Town Swamp was the main channel and low flood plain which formed part of the tributary system of the South Newport River. This river empties into Sapelo Sound between St. Catherine's and Sapelo Islands. Bull Town Swamp became part of the dividing line between Liberty and McIntosh Counties and on current topographic maps is marked "indefinite boundary." This swamp is a typical low country backwater and cypress swamp with all the richness of plant and animal life ascribed with such an ecological community.

The house which served Louis LeConte and his children was called Woodmans-ton. This site, vaguely defined by a few remaining hardwoods, flowering hushes and two palms, is about four miles southwest of Riceboro and can be reached by timbering roads running off two main roads.

William Bartram traveled through the area in the spring of 1773 crossing the South Newport River a few miles below Bull Town Swamp. He wrote glowingly of the area:

"... I re-assumed my travels,... passing through a level country, well watered by large streams, branches of Medway and Newport rivers, coursing from extensive swamps and marshes, their sources; these swamps are daily clearing and improving into large fruitful rice plantations."

And where the roads met canals there were..."Cypresses disticha, Gordonia Lacianthus, and Magnolia glauca, all planted by nature, and left standing by the virtuous inhabitants, to shade the road, and perfume the sultry air." He called the rice and corn plantations "humble, but elegant and neat habitation."

At LeConte, the main dam began about 400 feet southeast from the main house and ran a half mile at right angle to the main channel of Bull Town Swamp. A long dike ran at right angle to the main dam, intersecting the north end of this dam, and protected the area around the big house, the slave settlement and the corn and cotton fields from flooding.

In his autobiography, Joseph LeConte wrote that the house itself was "on a kind of knoll that became an island at high water."

The first house built on the property, according to family tradition, was more of a bachelor's quarters than a plantation mansion. The principal residence of John Eaton LeConte, Sr., was in New York with his family. This first house was burned by British troops under the command of Lt. Col. Prevost in a raid through Georgia in 1779. Joseph LeConte wrote that the ruins of the old well and the magnolia that ornamented the yard were present in 1903.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

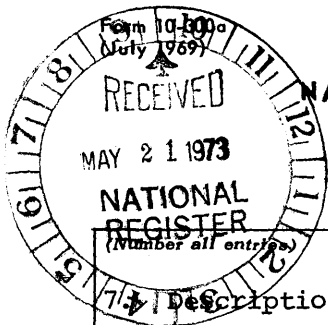
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

STATE		Georgia
COUNTY		Liberty-McIntosh
FOR NPS USE ONLY		
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE	
		JUN 18 1973

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)



7/4 Description, page two

LeConte-Woodmanston Site

It is not known when the main residence was rebuilt, but by 1789 the place had taken on the appearance of a fortified frontier station. In his autobiography, Joseph LeConte wrote that his grandfather built a stockade at Woodmanston and had a well dug to supply water for the defenders. This was a precaution against raids by Indians who lived south of the Altamaha. There was in 1789 an Indian raid and two Indians were killed and a third seriously wounded.

The house which served the family from about 1789 to 1843 was not pretentious. Emma LeConte Furman, a daughter of Joseph LeConte, wrote in a letter that the "new lodge, the Woodmanston of my childhood" was built a short distance from the site of the house burned by the British. Richard LeConte Anderson, Macon, Georgia, has a copy of this letter.

In 1810, Louis LeConte, son of John Eatton LeConte, Sr., married a local girl and settled permanently at the plantation. He started the floral and botanical garden and devoted the rest of his life to scientific pursuits here.

His son Joseph wrote of his father's garden:

"...About one acre of ground was set apart for this purpose...his special pride was four or five camellia trees - I say trees for even then they were a foot in diameter and fifteen feet high. I have seen the largest of these, a double white, with a thousand blossoms open at once, each blossom four or five inches in diameter, snow-white and double to the center. His beautiful garden became celebrated all over the United States and botanists from the north and from Europe came to visit..."

The garden was described in the 1830 J.C. Loudon Encyclopedia of Gardening:

"The garden of Louis LeConte Esq. near Riceboro is said by Mr. Gordon to be the richest in bulbs that he had ever seen. Mr. LeConte is an excellent botanist and vegetable physiologist. He also paid a great attention to the subject of aboriculture."

One other striking feature of the plantation was the avenue of oaks which was a mile and a fourth long. The exact description and location is recorded in the Liberty County courthouse.

The plantation had reached its peak, both in physical beauty and productivity, when Louis LeConte died in 1838. There were about 200 Negro slaves at the place then, an indication of the size of the operation.

Louis' daughter Jane and her husband, Dr. J.M.B. Harden, continued to live at Woodmanston until 1843, when they moved to a new house a mile west. The plantation soon began to deteriorate. This is made vivid in a letter written by Miss Mary Sharp Jones on March 13, 1856, (R.M. Myers, The Children of Pride, page 195):

"We went to Mrs. Harden's.... Mother invited Mrs. Harden to accompany us to Woodmanston as Miss Eliza (Clay) had never seen the Japonica there. So she ordered her carriage and went with us, and thanks to her generosity gave us a large and beautiful bouquet of red and variegated Japonica, the white being all over. The garden is shamefully neglected, rare flowers bloom in the midst of fennel and broom grass. No one takes any care at all of it now."

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STATE

Georgia

COUNTY

Liberty-McIntosh

FOR NPS USE ONLY

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

100

3 1973

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)



Description, page three

LeConte-Woodmanston Site

In 1930, G.B. Eunice, county agent of Liberty County, visited Woodmanston. He reports that the large double white camellia was not present but that there were some other large ones and also some smaller ones. One of the large ones was a particularly beautiful variegated form. Three days later he returned to get some cuttings from this variegated form and found that it had been removed by professionals. There was a large hole several feet square to mark the former spot. (The American Camellia Yearbook for 1949, page 179.)

The plantation was acquired in 1930 by C.B. Jones, a long lime resident of Liberty County, who used the land primarily for cattle grazing and timbering. In 1953, he leased the land to the Brunswick Pulp and Paper Company until 1983. Much of the full plantation, 3356 acres, has been clear-cut and planted in commercial pine. Some of the land near the site of the plantation house and the botanical garden has not been planted in pine.

In the fall of 1971, Col. Claude Black and William Fishbeck visited the site and Col. Black wrote:

"The area around the site...had grown into a tangled, all but unpenetrable jungle. When large trees are cut down, cattle grazing and cropping stopped, deterioration sets in.... Undergrowth took over part of the magnificent group of *Camellia japonica*... the only reminder was one lonely seedling camellia about 12 feet high struggling to live in competition with the lush wild growth which neglect had allowed to spring up. The only reminders, outside the garden area, were two sable palm trees, a grove of old crape myrtle...partially destroyed by a bulldozer, rampant growth of Cherokee Rose and a few unusually large pecan trees."

There are cypress trees in the swamp.

Col. Black, in February 1973, in answer to a question about the possibility of destruction of the Woodmanston site, wrote that when he first visited the site a portion of the "near environs of the plantation house" had been damaged severely by the excavation of a borrow-pit to get sand for road building and that virtually all mature hardwood trees in the area proposed for preservation had been killed by girdling.

Gordon Midgette, Staff Archaeologist for the Georgia Historical Commission, visited the Woodmanston site on weekends in May and June 1972. He shovel scraped and recorded about 200 square feet in an area about 100 yards from the main house. The area yielded substantial evidence of a wooden wall and wall trench which could have been a stockade.

Mr. Midgette recorded most of the existing plants and trees which seemed to be remnants of the garden and those in the area of the house site. There was extensive surface evidence for bricked pilings, walks and possibly floor foundations. The china which he recovered from the surface was all within the period ascribed to the house.

Under the rampant covering of vegetation, much physical evidence of the structures at Woodmanston remains waiting archaeological interpretation.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

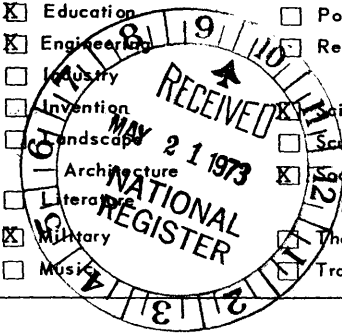
PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |  |  |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century |  |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1779, 1789, 1810

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Education   | <input type="checkbox"/> Political                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <u>History</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic               | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                        | _____  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture                      | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture           | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape              | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture           | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater                        | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce               | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation                 | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications         | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Military    |   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation           | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |   |  |



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Woodmanston, the coastal plantation of the LeConte family, started as a new economic venture and eventually served to stimulate the scientific interest of later generations. All that remains visible of the vast rice plantation and a renowned botanical garden are traces of the waterways, a lone camellia plant, and a few special trees. What was once a center for scientific investigation has become an archaeological site.

The contributions of the LeConte family were multiple.

John Eaton LeConte, Sr., spent his winters in Georgia, and the warmer months in New York. He acquired more than 3000 acres, much of it swampland and undesirable by many standards, to grow rice. Georgia, as a colony was about three decades old. The early ideas of producing wine and silk in the New World had proved impractical and many landowners were looking for crops better suited to the environment. When the English crown took control of the colony and permitted the holding of slaves, rice and extensive wetlands seemed to offer the proper combination.

While this coastal area was the land of climax forest, with live oaks covered with Spanish moss and magnolia trees and dozens of plants and birds rare to visitors, the LeConte dwelling structure was functional rather than extravagant.

The first house was burned by the British during the Revolution and there was a battle in Bull Town Swamp. The second house was called a lodge by one of the LeConte girls who grew up there. It was a frontier enterprise. The Indian country was just over the Altamaha River, about fifteen to twenty miles from the plantation. John Eaton LeConte, Sr., had to build a stockade and used it to defend his family and slaves against an Indian attack.

While the senior LeConte continued to live in Georgia only in the winters, one of his three sons moved to the plantation in 1810 to take charge. This was Louie, who graduated from Columbia College. He had studied medicine with the intent to practice it on his plantation. Louie married a Liberty County girl who died 13 years later, after bearing five children. Joseph, the youngest of the children, in his autobiography wrote of his father:

"In the early part of his lonely life, in order to divert his thoughts from his grief, he fitted up several rooms in the attic, especially one large one, as a chemical laboratory. Day after day, and sometimes all day, when not too much busied in the administration of his large plantation, he occupied himself with experimenting there. I remember vividly how, when permitted to be present, we boys followed him about silently and on tiptoe.... Although these experiments were undertaken in the first instance to divert his mind from his sorrow, yet his profound knowledge of chemistry, his deep interest and persistence, certainly eventuated in important

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

(continued)

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

American Camellia Society, Marshallville, Georgia, Telephone Interview by Marilyn Pennington, April 1973.  
 Armes, William Dallam, Editor, The Autobiography of Joseph LeConte. (New York: Appleton and Company, 1903).  
 Black, Col. Claude A., LeConte-Woodmanston Provisional Committee. Prepared original research and first draft of N.R. nomination form, GHC files.  
 Buckley, Jean K., Historic Sites Survey, Prepared research and draft of N.R. nomination form, GHC files.  
 Midgette, Gordon, GHC, Archaeological Excavation, May and June 1972.  
 Mitchell, William R., Jr., Historic Sites Survey, Consultant.

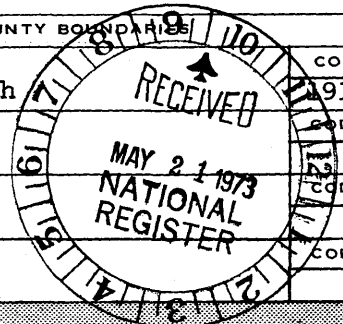
**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	31 ° 42 ' 07 "	81 ° 28 ' 41 "		0	0	
NE	31 ° 42 ' 07 "	81 ° 28 ' 15 "				
SE	31 ° 41 ' 44 "	81 ° 28 ' 15 "				
SW	31 ° 41 ' 44 "	81 ° 28 ' 41 "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 93.2

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
Georgia		McIntosh	91
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE



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ex

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
 Marilyn Pennington, Historic Sites Survey

ORGANIZATION: Georgia Historical Commission      DATE: May 15, 1973

STREET AND NUMBER:  
 116 Mitchell St., S.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Atlanta      STATE: Georgia      CODE: 13

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name: Mary Gregory Jewett  
 Title: State Historic Preservation Officer  
 Date: May 16, 1973

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Robert M. Utley  
 Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: 6/18/73

ATTEST:  
[Signature]  
 Acting Keeper of The National Register  
 Date: 6/5/73

STATE

Georgia

COUNTY

Liberty-McIntosh

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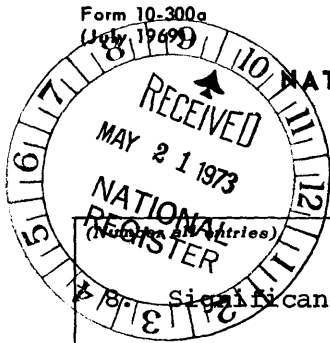
ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

JUN 8 1973

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)



Significance, page two

LeConte-Woodmanston Site

discoveries."

Louie LeConte fell into a low state of health without any assignable cause, his son wrote, and thinking it was brought on by fumes from the laboratory he turned to the making of a botanical and floral garden. His pride was several camellia trees which were a foot in diameter and fifteen feet high. (The Camellia, a native of China, was introduced to England about 1745.)

Joseph LeConte, who became a pioneer geologist, wrote in later years: "This garden was the joy and delight of my childhood." The garden became celebrated all over the United States.

When visitors came from the north or from Europe, Louis LeConte would take them into the Altamaha region to collect rare plants. "As the Altamaha region was a comparatively unexplored field, he discovered many new plants, but he gave them freely to his scientific friends."

When speaking of plants, he would give the accepted Linnean order, then add "But it belongs to a natural order of..." and give the typical genus. His knowledge of botany and chemistry was extensive, and he also was knowledgeable in zoology, physics and mathematics.

In writing about his early education, Joseph said the best he got was informal. He counted first the daily companionship of his father. "Next to this was the many mechanical operations going on continually on the plantation; and third, the unlimited freedom of the plantation life far away from city ways..."

All the plantation operations - tanning, shoemaking, blacksmithing, carpentering, and the triple phases of thrashing, winnowing and beating rice and of ginning, cleaning and packing cotton - were matched with interest by the Le Conte boys.

In 1838 on the day John, Lewis and Joseph LeConte were to leave for college, their father died of blood poisoning. It was the beginning of the end of the plantation. The sons went on to make reputations of their own. Joseph studied at Harvard with Louis Agassiz and was with notables such as Longfellow, Lowell, and Holmes daily. Both Joseph and John taught at southern universities; John and Joseph served the Confederacy during the Civil War, and both brothers moved to California after the war. John organized the University of California and acted as president until the regents selected a permanent officer.

Joseph wrote that Berkeley was founded on this principal: "The interrelation of the different departments of thought, especially of scientific thought, is such that a good general knowledge of all is absolutely necessary to the highest success in any one special field." It is possible that this feeling for broad knowledge was initiated in their childhood days at the coastal plantation.

Rice planting at Woodmanston was similar to the methods described by Herbert Ravenal Sass in A Carolina Rice Plantation of the Fifties, page 22. This was the use of inland swamps, forest swamps not immediately adjacent to a river. To obtain an abundant supply of water, to help the growth of rice

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	Georgia	
COUNTY	Liberty-McIntosh	
FOR NPS USE ONLY		
ENTRY NUMBER		DATE
		JUN 18 1973

(Number all entries)

8. Significance, page three

LeConte-Woodmanston Site

and to inhibit weeds, a swamp or lead situated at a slightly higher level than the fields was dammed. This formed a lake known as a reserve, or backwater. This is still in tact at Woodmanston, and is close to the house area.

Concerned citizens in the Liberty County area have been working to preserve the LeConte site. They formed a provisional committee, did a great amount of research on the site, and talked with officials of the paper company. In November 1971, the Brunswick Pulp and Paper Company planned to clear-cut and plant in pine all the land at Woodmanston dry enough to grow pine and to cut the hardwood in the swamps. The paper company has since offered 25 acres containing the house and garden site for, as Col. Black has suggested, a living memorial to the LeContes. The paper company has a lease on the 3356 acres until 1983, with an option to renew the lease or buy the land then.

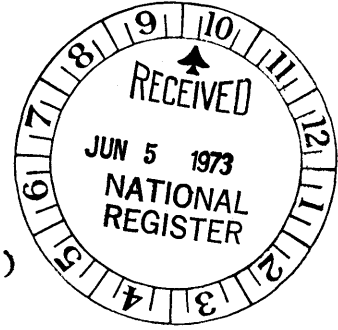
The citizens committee, headed by Col. Black, turned its material over to the Liberty County Historical Society in 1973. The committee was not intended to be an operational agency, but had as its objective the interpretation and partial restoration of the rice plantation and the preservation of some of the swamp and its associated plants and animals. Emphasis would have been placed on the botanical garden, with both rare and indigenous plants featured. There is a drawing of the original garden reported to be included in a book Famous English and American Gardens, but the Liberty County people have not found a copy. There are however several residents who visited the garden and remember its general layout. One sketch is included in this nomination submission.

The 93.6 acres nominated includes the riceland and visible waterways, much of which has reverted to swamp.

There are, over America, many memorials to the LeContes. These include Mount LeConte in the Great Smokey Mountain National Park, named for Joseph, as well as LeConte Falls in Yosemite National Park, Mount LeConte in Sequoia National Park and LeConte Divide in King's Canyon National Park. There is the Joseph LeConte Elementary School and LeConte Avenue in Berkeley, LeConte Hall at the University of Georgia and LeConte College at the University of South Carolina. Redefining the plantation and re-establishing a spectacular garden for the public to enjoy would be in keeping with Louis LeConte's gentle philosophy.







THE LOUIS LeCONTE BOTANICAL AND FLORAL GARDEN (s)

(A Compilation by Claude A. Black)

Around 1810, Louis LeConte began developing a small but excellent botanical and floral garden at Woodmanston, the plantation which his father, John Eaton LeConte I had established "in and around Bull Town Swamp, Liberty County, Georgia, during the colonial era.

Louis LeConte (1782-1838) was a descendant of Guillaume LeConte, who had migrated from Rouen, France, to New Rochelle, New York, via Holland and England. Louis was educated at Columbia College in New York City where he graduated in 1799 at age 17.

Louis' son, Professor Joseph LeConte states in his Autobiography published in 1903:

"He studied medicine under Dr. Hosack, and attained great knowledge and skill in that profession. He was called "Doctor" but I think never graduated as such, his only object in studying medicine apparently being to practice it on his own plantation".

According to Gardener's Magazine, published in London, England, 1832:

"The garden of the American patriot Hamilton was in his time one of the richest in plants in America. Those of Dr. Hosack.....and Mr. LeConte were also all celebrated for their botanical riches."

Dr. Hosack may have inspired young Louis LeConte with an interest in fine gardening in addition to having taught him medicine and surgery. Be this as it may, it is a fact that students at Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons were required to

The Louis LeConte Botanical and Floral Garden (s)

include considerable botany in their courses.

A strong reason for Louis LeConte's intensified interest in his botanical and floral garden during one phase of his life at Woodmanston is stated by his son Joseph in his 1903 Autobiography. Describing Louis LeConte's condition after the death of his wife, Ann Quarterman LeConte in 1826, Joseph LeConte wrote:

"It was during this time that he fell into a low state of health without any assignable cause.... His ill health I am sure was brought on, not by any fumes of the laboratory, as he imagined, but from anguish for the loss of his wife.... Always fond of nature and science in all departments, he now devoted himself more and more ardently to the making and cultivation of a botanical and floral garden."

There is some opinion to the effect that Louis LeConte did not begin developing his botanical and floral garden at Woodmanston until some time after 1826. As will be elaborated in succeeding paragraphs, one of the principal plant collections featured by Louis LeConte in his botanical and floral garden was a group of *Camellia japonicas*. There is clear documentation that he started planting *Camellia japonicas* in his garden around 1810. In September 1853, Louis LeConte's youngest daughter, Anne LeConte Stevens wrote a letter to the editor of The Soil Of The South, using the pen name "Native Flora" in which she stated:

"You seem delighted with Mrs. Marshall's fine camellias. I am afraid you would not credit me, were I to describe several standing in the garden of the family homestead about ten miles from this place (Walthourville). My father planted them there upwards of forty years ago; they were originally obtained from the elder Prince of Long Island."

It was the quality rather than numbers of camellias planted and nurtured by Louis LeConte which gave this collection distinction.

The Louis LeConte Botanical And Floral Garden (s)

Writing of the period shortly before Louis LeConte's death in 1838, Joseph LeConte stated:

"Every day after his breakfast, he took his last cup of coffee---his second or third---in his hand and walked about the garden, enjoying the beauty and neatness and giving minute directions for its care and improvement. His especial pride was four or five camellia---trees---I say trees for even then they were a foot in diameter and fifteen feet high. I have seen the largest of these, a double white, with a thousand blossoms open at once, each blossom four or five inches in diameter, snow-white and double to the center."

Between the period to which this description applied---the 1830's and the time of a report made sixty-six years later, this specimen had grown about four inches in diameter for Professor Joseph LeConte writes:

"In 1896 I visited the old place again (Woodmanston). It was a mere wilderness but the old camellia tree still stood covered with blossoms. I measured the girth; ten inches from the ground where the great branches came off, it was fifty-six inches in circumference".

The fact that this camellia tree grew four inches in diameter in sixty-six years is not remarkable. The fact that it survived, continued to grow and produce a beautiful yield of blossoms each year under such adverse conditions of neglect and abuse does say something.

Fortunately, this last visit by Professor LeConte actually made in January 1897 was photographed. Dr. Joseph Nesbit LeConte, son of Professor Joseph LeConte took a picture of his father standing by the old double-white Camellia. The negative of this photograph is in possession of the National Sierra Club in San Francisco. The Liberty County Historical Society has an excellent copy.

The Louis LeConte Botanical And Floral Garden (s)

The late Mr. G. B. Eunice, long time County Agent for Liberty County stated that the most famous of the Louis LeConte camellias had vanished from the Woodmanston Garden by 1930. In a 1949 interview with Dr. James Stokes who was doing research for an article, Notes On Georgia Camelliana, which was published in The American Camellia Yearbook 1949, Mr. Eunice stated:

"In 1930 he visited Woodmanston. The large double-white Camellia was not present but there were some other large ones and also some smaller ones. One of the larger ones was a particularly beautiful variegated form. Three days later he returned to get some cuttings from this variegated form and found that it had been removed by professionals. There was a large hole several feet square, to mark the former spot."

The double-white was Alba plena which had originally been brought to England by Capt. Connor of The East India Company from the orient. According to Stokes, Michael Foy of New York imported Alba plena from England to America as early as 1800 but as previously mentioned, Louis LeConte's daughter Ann LeConte Stevens stated that her father obtained his original Camellia stock from the elder Prince of Long Island.

Camellia japonicas which have descended from the Louis LeConte collection at Woodmanston still grow in old gardens and in grounds around abandoned houses in Liberty and nearby Counties. "Norman Red" is a good example. The first Norman Red stock consisted of seedlings transplanted from the Botanical Garden at Woodmanston by Mrs. Jane LeConte Harden to Halifax, the new home which she and Dr. Harden completed building across the Barrington Road from the old Woodmanston Plantation house in 1843. From Halifax, specimens of Norman Red Camellia were taken to the Norman home near Walthourville by a member

The Louis LeConte Botanical And Floral Garden (s)

of the Norman family who was a descendant of Jane LeConte Harden. From the Norman place, Norman Red Camellia stock has spread to homes in Liberty and adjacent counties.

- For several years prior to his death, the sites of Woodmanston and Cedar Hill plantations were owned by Mr. C. B. Jones. Both of these properties are now part of the C. B. Jones' Estate. There is now growing near the cottage at Cedar Hill site a fine large specimen of a beautiful double-pink Camellia japonica which members of the C. B. Jones family state came from scions of camellia originally growing in the Botanical Garden at Woodmanston.

Bulb type plants were another major feature of the Louis LeConte Botanical and Floral Garden. In an article written for Volume VIII of J. C. Loudouns' Gardener's Magazine describing a visit with Louis LeConte at Woodmanston, Mr. Alexander Gordon of Leicester, England wrote:

"The Garden of Lewis LeConte, Esq., near Riceboro, in Liberty County, Georgia, forty miles south of Savannah is decidedly the richest in bulbs I have ever seen; and their luxuriance would astonish those who have only seen them in the confined state in which we are obliged to grow them in this country".

But there is newly discovered evidence to lead to the belief that bulb type plants were growing in Louis LeConte's Garden as early as 1813. While researching LeConte papers in the Library of The American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia in September, 1972, Dr. George Rogers, Professor of History, Georgia Southern College, found a manuscript list of forty bulb type plants. The list was a record of the times of germination, flowering and hybernation of

The Louis LeConte Botanical And Floral Garden (s)

each plant for the years 1813, 181~~4~~ and 1815. Dr. Rogers believes that the list is in the handwriting of Major John Eaton LeConte, brother of Louis LeConte and that it is a record of observations made of plants growing in the Botanical Garden at Woodmanston. The Botanical Garden was established and maintained by Louis LeConte, but his brother, John Eaton LeConte, was also a keen and accomplished naturalist who frequently visited Woodmanston. One instance which indicates the latter's interest in plants is the fact that it was he who sent the pear tree from a Nursery in the north to Halifax plantation from which all of the famous LeConte Pear trees descended. Miss Clermont Lee, a Professional Landscape Architect and an excellent botanist has collected data on the bloom dates of bulb type plants in the Coastal Georgia area for fifteen years to include many of those shown on the list found by Dr. Rogers. Her list is in close accord with the supposed Major John Eaton LeConte list.

One of the best sources of information on plants other than Camellias and bulb types grown by Louis LeConte in his Botanical and Floral Garden and surrounding grounds is found in an article titled To Remake An Old Coastal Garden, written by George D. Lowe, and published in the November 22, 1936, issue of the Savannah Morning News. Mr. Lowe was a well known horticulturist and horticultural writer who lived in Brunswick, Georgia. The following are excerpts from Mr. Lowe's article:

"On the forward schedule of Santo Domingo State Park is a project to reproduce as nearly as possible a plantation garden such as existed at many places along the Georgian Coast in the heyday of its history, the period from 1840 to 1861.....It has been my good fortune to talk to several persons of advanced age whose memories are vivid where antebellum subjects were concerned..... It may be assumed readily that the close relationship

The Louis LeConte Botanical And Floral Garden (s)

"and affiliations among the planting families from Savannah to St. Marys made the interchange of cuttings and rooted plants a constant feature of visits. Therefore, most gardens showed the same favorites of that day and the work of reproduction is simplified to a degree.....From the two outstanding gardens of the region many rare plants went to the homes of kindred and friends so early that the Oleander, Lagerstroemias, Camellia japonica and Chinese Magnolias are known to have been in Georgia just a few short years after the introduction to the trade.....Unquestionably the LeConte garden in Liberty County near the head of South Newport River was the proving ground for plants that are now disseminated all over the south. All the LeContes were scientists. A New Jersey member of the family was a famous botanist and there is evidence that he visited the Georgia branch frequently and collected in this area. There were Philadelphia connections who habitually sent to Georgia plants brought into that city that were known to be tender for that climate.....The Chinese Magnolias were undoubtedly introduced to the South from that garden and some fine specimens of Soulangeana persist in that region now in isolated yards. There seems to have been a fine specimen of the wonderful Star Magnolia there. The Banana Shrub and the Tea Olive were in both gardens and Wisteria was there almost as early as the name was applied to it in botanical literature. The Cape Jessamine was in both gardens from the time of its introduction into America. Mimosa and Popinae, the two long known Acacias were in both gardens and I suspect the LeConte place as being the point of dissemination of the former. The European Olive, the Tamarix, the Tea plant, the European Laurel and Myrtle, all were in both gardens very early, unquestionably. The native Sweet Shrub and Mock Orange as well as Cherry Laurel were all in the LeConte Garden and a wonderful Shrub of the region, mentioned by Bartram and wondered about by some who remembered the place in its glory, must have been Stuartia in its far southern form."

The information collected from such sources as: the Alexander Gordon articles which were published in the Loudoun Gardener's Magazine of 1832, passages from the Joseph LeConte Autobiography of 1903, the Major John Eaton LeConte listing of bulb plants supposedly growing at Woodmanston, 1813-1815, the George D. Lowe 1936 article and local tradition indicates that it is now possible to reconstruct a reasonably complete and reasonably authentic list of the plants

The Louis LeConte Botanical And Floral Garden (s)

which were grown in the Louis LeConte Botanical and Floral Garden during its heyday and also those growing around the garden and Woodmanston plantation house.

The size and general location of the garden are known, but more exact and specific data on boundaries and layout of plant beds, etc., is needed. Joseph LeConte stated unequivocally in his 1903 Autobiography:

"He (Lewis LeConte) now devoted himself more and more ardently to the making and cultivation of a botanical and floral garden. About an acre of ground was set apart for this purpose...."

Two extant photographs establish the general area of the Louis LeConte Botanical and Floral Garden---one made by Dr. Joseph Nisbet LeConte in 1897 and the other by Dr. Clyde E. Keeler made in 1949. Each of these pictures includes a person in the foreground with the two well-known Sabal Palms (Cabbage Palmettoes) in the background. These two trees are still standing at Woodmanston. On the back of a copy of the 1897 photo, Dr. Joseph Nisbet LeConte wrote in pencil "Picture of my father, Joseph LeConte, standing under the white camellia tree in the old garden of Louis LeConte, Liberty County, Georgia." The Keeler 1949 photograph is reproduced in the Stokes article in The American Camellia Yearbook 1949 with the caption: "Mr. C. B. Jones of Riceboro standing at the site of the former Botanic Garden at Woodmanston".

By using the two existing Sabal Palm trees to establish a line of direction and a scale of distance, the spots where Professor LeConte and Mr. C. B. Jones stood while being photographed, and hence two points within the area of the former garden, can be determined within a few feet.



The Louis LeConte Botanical And Floral Garden (s)

There is reason to hope that a detailed drawing of the Louis LeConte Botanical and Floral Garden will be found one day. There is a direct document that a garden book containing such a drawing has been published. Although the one known copy has been destroyed, other copies should exist some place. This documentation is contained in a letter written by the late Miss Julia King, a historian of Coastal Georgia and a long-time resident of Colonel's Island, to James A. LeConte, Sr., November 20, 1933. The letter is one of the James A. LeConte, Sr. Collection now in possession of the University of Georgia Library at Athens. The particular letter includes the following passage:

"My father had a book which had a picture of Louis LeConte's Botanical Garden, published in England about 100 years ago....it was ruined in a hurricane. The book I refer to was bound in leather and full of pictures of villas and gardens in Europe and had in it a great deal about gardening. My father often showed this book to visitors, pointing out the picture of the Louis LeConte Botanical Garden and drawing attention to the statement that there was only one Riceboro in the world."

In the early 1830's Louis LeConte's Garden and probably the grounds around Woodmanston plantation house, reached their peak of excellence and renown---the time when Louis LeConte received and aided plant scientists from other states and from Europe. But after his death in 1838, it seems there was no one left who could or would maintain the botanical and floral garden.

After the death of Louis LeConte, the 3,356 acre tract of land "all in one body" which comprised the Woodmanston plantation of Louis LeConte's time was divided into six tracts by Court Order so that the land could be divided among six surviving heirs. The division containing the plantation house, botanical and floral garden, etc.,

The Louis LeConte Botanical And Floral Garden (s)

encompassed 507 acres and retained the name Woodmanston. This parcel was designated No. 3 Parcel. Parcel No. 4E lying mostly west of the Fort Barrington Road, contained 350 acres and was given the name "Halifax".

For reasons not exactly clear at this time, both Woodmanston and Halifax parcels appear to have passed to the ownership of Dr. J. M. B. Harden and his wife, Jane LeConte Harden, not long after the death of Louis LeConte. One explanation is that Jane LeConte Harden received Halifax as her inheritance share and that the central Woodmanston Parcel No. 3 had been given to her since she had served as Mistress of Woodmanston plantation house from an early age. Her mother had died in 1826 when Jane was twelve years of age. She and her husband, Dr. J. M. B. Harden, had continued to live at Woodmanston house after their marriage in 1833 and after Dr. Harden had begun the practice of medicine in Liberty County until their new house had been completed at Halifax in 1843. Insofar as is known, no member of the LeConte family ever lived in Woodmanston plantation house after 1843. Dr. Harden died in 1848 at the age of thirty-eight leaving Jane a plantation to manage and four children to rear. These were busy times, leaving Jane with little time to supervise Woodmanston a mile away. So that, as early as 1856, only the camellias and a few struggling flowers remained of the Louis LeConte Botanical and Floral Garden. This sad state is made explicit in a letter written March 13, 1856, by Miss Mary Sharp Jones to Miss Laura E. Maxwell and published in Manson Myer's Children Of Pride. The following is an excerpt:

The Louis LeConte Botanical And Floral Garden (s)

".....Yesterday mother, Miss Eliza (Clay) and myself set out on a visiting expedition. We went to Mrs. Harden's....Mother invited Mrs. Harden to accompany us to Woodmanston as Miss Eliza never had seen the japonicas growing there. So she ordered her carriage and went with us, and thanks to her generosity, gave us a large and beautiful boquet of red and variegated japonicas, the white being all over. The garden is shamefully neglected, rare flowers blooming in the midst of fennel and broom grass. No one takes any care of it at all now."

While the Botanical and Floral Garden at Woodmanston was no doubt the focal area for Louis LeConte's plant studies and experiments, in a larger sense, the other grounds in the vicinity of the plantation house and other buildings, the Bull Town cypress black-water swamp environment and all of the nearby countryside, even to the south of the Altamaha River were "Gardens" to Louis LeConte and his children. Thus the use of the plural form in the title of the marker on U. S. 17 LeConte Botanical Gardens takes on significance.

It is reasonable to assume that John Eaton LeConte I followed South Carolina low country patterns in treatment of grounds around the plantation house when he established Woodmanston beginning about 1760. The South Carolina low country style of plantation landscape was described by the Duke de la Rochefoucauld Liancourt during the course of a visit to the Ashley River plantations in South Carolina in the spring of 1796. He said:

"....The gardens along the river are better laid out, better stocked with good trees than any I have hitherto seen in America. In order to have here a fine garden, one has but to let the proper trees remain, here and there in clumps, plant bushes in front of them and arrange other trees according to their height."

The account of an 1832 visit to Woodmanston by Alexander Gordon of Leicester, England, previously referred to, is ample

The Louis LeConte Botanical And Floral Garden (s)

indication that Louis LeConte's observation and study of plants extended far beyond those growing in his Botanical and Floral Garden. Consider the following excerpts from the Gordon account:

"....This gentleman (Louis LeConte) has for above 30 years given his attention to the successions of the different species of timber...on Thursday the 27th of January, we took a journey of fifty miles, and crossed the Altamaha river to search for a tree of that species (Magnolia pyramidata) M. LeConte had seen there eighteen months previous. We found it."

The plant life in and around the edges of Bull Town Swamp which formed a background for Louis LeConte's Botanical and Floral Garden, 1810-1838, and attracted his interest and admiration is still luxuriant and varied today. One of the most profuse and spectacular plants growing at Woodmanston Site is the Cherokee rose (*Rosa laevigata*). Its evergreen and lustrous foliage festoon the pines on dry ground and live oaks at swamp edge. The late Dr. Francis Harper, well known naturalist and authority on John and William Bartram visited Woodmanston Site in 1933. In 1949, he wrote to Dr. James Stokes about this visit. In this letter he stated:

".....The camellias had all been carted away by vandals. There were some Cherokee roses left on a bank in the old garden....."

The bank which parallels the trunk canal and runs near by the site of the Botanical and Floral Garden is still covered in many places with Cherokee roses. It is said that the LeContes planted Cherokee roses in lieu of building fences.

Another species of vine, Carolina yellow Jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*) cover trees with a bright accent of yellow flowers in February and March at Woodmanston Site.

Some of the most colorful and delicate of the plants at Woodmanston are the small aquatics growing at the edge of Bull Town

The Louis LeConte Botanical And Floral Garden (s)

Swamp. These include:

Southern Blue Flag (*Iris versicolor*)  
Pickerel Weed (*Pontederia cordata*)  
Golden Canna (*Canna flaccida*)  
Water Primrose (*Jussiaea repens*)  
Cat-tail (*Typha latifolia*)  
Lizard's-Tail (*Saururus cernuus*), etc.

There are some beautiful indigenous small trees and shrubs which manage to compete still with the jungle-like undergrowth which discontinuance of cultivation, prohibiting cattle grazing, fire prevention and cutting of the mature trees have brought to the site of the former garden and surrounding grounds. Some of these are:

Southern crabapple (*Malus angustifolia*)  
American Holly (*Ilex opaca*)  
Red Haw (*Crataegus verdis*)  
Flame Buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*)  
Sparkleberry (*Vaccinium arboreum*)  
Snowbell (*Styrax americana*)

If such native species as these were not grown by Louis LeConte in his Botanical and Floral Garden, certainly they must have graced the grounds around the garden and Woodmanston plantation house.

There are a few indicators left at the Site as reminders of landscape planted grounds which surrounded Woodmanston plantation house and of Louis LeConte's Botanical and Floral Garden. The hydraulic engineering earthworks used to store water and to regulate flow onto and off rice fields and of course, the Bull Town Swamp environment are in evidence today. A few old brick of antique English dimensions, some large pecan trees, an Ailanthus tree, some very old crepe myrtle shrubs and the two extant Sabal Palm trees give at least some idea of the location of Woodmanston plantation house and the planting of its surrounding grounds. The site of the Louis LeConte Botanical and floral garden is marked by a lone remaining camellia

The Louis LeConte Botanical And Floral Garden (s)

tree---a red seedling now some twelve feet high. Most of the area of former garden and surrounding grounds is now covered with an almost impenetrable growth of shrub myrtle, weeds, briars and vines.

Dr. James Stokes closed his 1949 article with the statement:

"....The central theme of these notes on Georgia Camelliana has been the old Double white (Alba plena) camellia of Woodmanston and activities related to the Lewis LeConte botanic garden. It is pleasant to reflect on the glories of this garden and sad to think of the loss of such a treasure initiated about 140 years ago."

Dr. Stokes' statement could be a

"requiem for the loss of a treasure initiated 140 years ago"

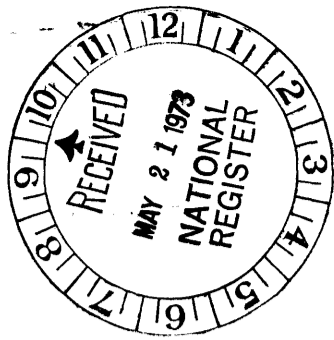
but it need not be. At a Quarterly Meeting of the Liberty County Historical Society, a Resolution which reads in part as follows was adopted by unanimous vote:

"Be it resolved that the Liberty County Historical Society propose to the LeConte-Woodmanston Provisional Committee that the Society resume responsibility for the LeConte-Woodmanston Project."

At a Meeting of the LeConte-Woodmanston Provisional Committee held at Midway, Georgia, March 11, 1973, the Committee formally accepted the Proposal made by the Liberty County Historical Society. On May 16, 1973, the Georgia Historical Commission forwarded a National Register inventory-nomination for the LeConte-Woodmanston Site to the United States Department of The Interior urging

"every consideration you can give this nomination so that the Site can be registered as soon as possible."

A living Shrine instead of a Requiem---this is a Project worthy of support.



DAM

RICE FIELDS

FLOOD GATE

RICE DAMS

MULBERRY TREES

PEARS

BOTANICAL GARDENS

PEARS

BULBS

RUINS - OLD HOUSE

OLD BRICK

OLD BRICK

ROSES

BULBS

BRICK PERSIS

CAMELLIA JAPONICA

WHITE

RED

VARIEGATED RED

PECAN

BULBS

SOME SHRUBS

BULBS

SABAL PALM

OAK AVENUE

SABAL PALM

CHEROKEE ROSES

OLEANDERS

OAK

OAK

PECAN

PECAN

OAK

OAK

TEA PLANTS

TEA PLANTS

THINK OLD OUTBUILDINGS & SLAVE HOUSES IN THIS SECTION

OLD ROAD TO DAM

CHEROKEE ROSES

PLANTATION HOUSE & SURROUNDING AREA, LE CONTE - WOODMANSTON PLANTATION SITE BASED ON SKETCH FROM MEMORY BY MRS. M. H. RAHN, MARCH 31ST. 1972 (REDRAWN 4-20-72 BY C. LEE) NO SCALE