

the tide-flow method, the unusual requirements of the soil, and the knowledge and skill of enslaved Africans and African Americans. The tide-flow method required the flooding and draining of rice fields on the basis of tidal fluctuations. Because rice growth requires fresh water, rice lands were located above the saltwater lines on freshwater rivers. Furthermore, rice lands were positioned where the freshwater level could be raised by each high tide.⁵

The soil required for growing good rice crops consisted of clay and swamp muck. As a part of the subsoil, clay retained water well when flooded and thus prevented the fields from losing large amounts of water through leakage. The region's five large rivers, Savannah, Ogeechee, Altamaha, Satilla, and St. Mary's, were vital to the growth of rice and served as the focal point for settlement.⁶ In coastal Georgia, transformation of the landscape emanated from the knowledge systems of Africans who were transplanted from rice-growing regions in West Africa. By 1860 three principal watershed rice districts had emerged: the Savannah-Ogeechee district, located between the Savannah and Ogeechee rivers; the Midway district, located between the Savannah and Altamaha rivers; and the Altamaha district, which stretched from the Atlantic between the Altamaha and St. Mary's rivers. By definition, a watershed is the land area which contributes surface water to a river or other body of water. The boundaries of a watershed are formed by a high point and all water flows down to the lowest point or watershed outlet. Settlement in watershed areas is characterized by a complex system involving social, ecological, and physical factors. The water served as a powerful unifying force in watershed districts.⁷

Along the Savannah and Ogeechee rivers, over 12,000 enslaved Africans labored on lowcountry plantations.⁸ These plantations included Vallambrosia, Grove Point, Grove Hill, and Wild Horn, which were established by descendants of wealthy South Carolina planters. Daniel Blake of South Carolina purchased 1,321 acres of land, which comprised Vallambrosia plantation, from Stephen Elliott in 1827.⁹ A few years later, Arthur Heyward, who married Blake's daughter, purchased the land and expanded it to 2,692 acres.¹⁰ During this same period, Stephen Elliott consolidated Grove Hill plantation from the initial 840 acres purchased in 1797 to 1,340 acres. Elliott's son, Reverend Stephen Elliott Jr., sold the plantation to William and Stephen Habersham in 1849.¹¹

Stephen Habersham began acquiring land in the Ogeechee area in 1848, when he purchased 900 acres from Francis H. MacLeod's estate.¹² MacLeod inherited Wild Horn plantation in the early 1800s from his grandfather Francis Harris, a speaker of the Colonial Assembly and a partner in the mercantile firm Habersham and Harris. Harris enlarged his initial 500-acre land grant to 3,400 acres.¹³ Similarly Grove Point plantation initially consisted of 500 acres granted to South Carolina planter-merchant James Powell, who received a total of fifteen land grants in Georgia, totaling 6,645 acres.¹⁴ In 1846 John R. Cheves purchased Grove Point plantation, which consisted of 1,500 acres.¹⁵