



Plantation districts Savannah-Chatham County

The Midway watershed community included Bryan, Liberty, and McIntosh counties; the latter was at the geographic center of Georgia's rice coast in 1860. Two of the earliest cotton and rice plantations were constructed on St. Catherine's Island in Liberty County and on Sapelo Island in McIntosh County. Jacob Waldburg developed extensive holdings on St. Catherine's Island, which at its peak, in 1853, included 255 enslaved Africans and African Americans. Waldburg also owned properties in Savannah.¹⁶ Similarly Thomas Spalding owned extensive rice, cotton, wheat, and sugar cane plantations on Sapelo Island, where 300 enslaved Africans and African Americans labored in 1853.¹⁷ According to the 1860 census, 41,084 Georgia slaveholders had an average of 11.2 slaves each, with owners in Liberty and McIntosh counties holding double the state average.¹⁸ By 1850 the largest planters in the Midway district, holding over 200 slaves, included Pierce Butler, with 505 bondmen and bondwomen on Butler's Island; and Randolph Spalding, with 252 enslaved persons.¹⁹

The Altamaha River estuary served as a natural divider for the islands south and north of the Altamaha, where the third watershed district developed. As the Altamaha approached the sea, it partitioned into several channels that joined, separated, and rejoined each other in the marshland of the river's delta.²⁰ The marshlands and tidal rivers surrounding St. Catherine's, Ossabaw, Sapelo, St.