

**BAHAMIAN SHIP GRAFFITI**

A Thesis

by

GRACE S. R. TURNER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2004

Major Subject: Anthropology

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## ABSTRACT

Bahamian Ship Graffiti. (December 2004)

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The Bahamian archipelago covers over 5,000 square miles of the Atlantic Ocean at the northwestern edge of the Caribbean Sea. In the *Age of Sail*, from the late 15th to early 20th centuries, these islands were on major sailing routes between the Caribbean, Central America, and Europe. Bahamians developed life-ways using their islands' location to their advantage.

Archaeological evidence of the significance of shipping activity is quite lacking. This research aimed to help fill the void by documenting examples of ship graffiti throughout the Bahamas. Examples of ship graffiti were documented with photographs and tracings. The Bahamian examples all date to the 19th and 20th centuries, 100 years later than other examples from the Caribbean and North America. They are also unique in being incised into the stone surfaces of building walls, caves, stones on a hillside, even on a slate fragment. It is possible that ship graffiti were also engraved on wooden surfaces but these have not survived in the archaeological record. Images depict locally-built vessels such as sloops and schooners as well as larger, ocean-going vessels.

Ship graffiti are at sites associated mainly with people of African heritage, another possible social grouping being persons of lower economic status. Graffiti details consistently indicate that the artists were familiar with ship construction and rigging.

This analysis of ship graffiti gives some understanding of the significance of ships and shipping in the Bahamian economy.

This thesis is dedicated to **Josiah**, of Cheshire Hall estate, Providenciales, Turks & Caicos Islands, and to all the un-named artists who created the graffiti that became the subject of my research. May this work serve as a lasting memory of appreciation to all of them.

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Thanks for the travel support from my home office, the Bahamas' Antiquities, Monuments & Museums Corporation under Director, Keith Tinker. Thanks also to Gary Larsen, Executive Director of the Bahamas National Trust, for permission to conduct research at *Great Hope* plantation, Crooked Island. Thanks to Don and June MacMillan for hosting me in their home on Crooked Island and to June for driving me to the site and patiently trekking deep into the bush and clambering over ruins in search of the elusive ship graffiti. Thanks to Ethlyn Gibbs-Williams, Colette Robinson, and Bryan Manco of the Turks & Caicos Islands National Trust for accommodating my research requests with little prior notice.

My thanks to Gail Saunders, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, and Mrs. Murphy, chief librarian, of the Nassau Public Library, for permission to document the ship graffiti in the basement cell of that building. Thanks to David Cates, president of the Bahamas Historical Society, for permission to document ship graffiti from *Tusculum* estate, and to photograph ship models in the Society's museum collection. Thanks as well to Dr. Paul Farnsworth for permission to use site maps from excavations at *Clifton*, on New Providence, and *Great Hope* and *Marine Farm*, on Crooked Island. Thanks also

to Robert Carr for permission to use maps and images of the ship graffiti from the New Plymouth jail site, Green Turtle Cay, Abaco. Thanks also to the Research Room staff of the Department of Archives: Queenie Butler, Lulamae Gray, Edith Stirrup, and Karen Dorsett.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  | Page |
|--|------|
| ABSTRACT .....   | iii  |
| DEDICATION .....   | v    |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....   | vi   |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS .....  | viii |
| LIST OF FIGURES .....  | x    |
| <br>CHAPTER  |      |
| I INTRODUCTION – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....                  | 1    |
| The Research Challenge .....                                     | 1    |
| Theoretical Approach .....                                       | 6    |
| Relevance of Folklore Sources .....                              | 9    |
| Sources from the Field of History .....                          | 13   |
| Research Hypothesis .....  | 14   |
| II HISTORY OF THE BAHAMIAN MARITIME<br>LANDSCAPE .....           | 16   |
| Introduction .....   | 16   |
| Lucayans .....   | 18   |
| European Settlement .....  | 22   |
| Piracy .....   | 24   |
| Plantations .....  | 27   |
| Wrecking .....   | 29   |
| Other Maritime Activity .....                                    | 33   |
| III SURVEY OF THE SHIP GRAFFITI –<br>FORMULATING QUESTIONS ..... | 35   |
| Examples of Graffiti First Noted .....                           | 35   |
| Research Possibilities .....                                     | 36   |
| Historic Period Ship Graffiti Elsewhere in the Americas .....    | 38   |
| Assessment of the Research Potential .....                       | 42   |
| Bahamian Sites Examined .....                                    | 44   |
| New Providence .....   | 44   |
| San Salvador .....   | 51   |
| Turks & Caicos Islands .....                                     | 55   |

| CHAPTER   | Page |
|---|------|
| Crooked Island .....                              | 57   |
| The Abacos .....                                  | 59   |
| Research Implications .....                       | 61   |
| IV CATALOGUE OF BAHAMIAN SHIP GRAFFITI .....      | 64   |
| Methodology .....                                 | 64   |
| New Providence .....                              | 67   |
| San Salvador .....                                | 102  |
| Turks & Caicos Islands .....                      | 140  |
| Crooked Island .....                              | 155  |
| The Abacos .....                                  | 166  |
| V CONCLUSIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS .....           | 178  |
| REFERENCES .....                                  | 184  |
| APPENDIX A GLOSSARY OF NAUTICAL TERMINOLOGY ..... | 195  |
| VITA .....  | 199  |

## LIST OF FIGURES

|            |  | Page |
|------------|--|------|
| Figure 1   | Map of the Bahamas, including the Turks & Caicos Islands .....   | 17   |
| Figure 2   | Half model of the <i>Marie J. Thompson</i> , a four-masted schooner<br>launched at Harbour Island, 1928 .....                              | 34   |
| Figure 3   | Model of a Bahamian sloop .....  | 34   |
| Figure 4   | Taino mural depicting forced tribute .....   | 38   |
| Figure 5   | Detail of a Spanish vessel within the mural .....  | 39   |
| Figure 6   | A spritsail mast on this three-masted Spanish ship suggests a<br><i>terminus ante quem</i> date ca. 1720 .....                             | 40   |
| Figure 7   | Tracing of a late 17th/early 18th century sloop, Red Farm,<br>Martha's Vineyard .....  | 41   |
| Figure 8   | Graffito of a contemporary Bermuda sloop, also from<br>Red Farm .....  | 41   |
| Figure 9   | Late 20th century ship graffito spray-painted onto seaside rock<br>face .....  | 43   |
| Figure 10  | Location of ship graffiti site on Baie Verte Peninsula, New<br>Foundland .....   | 43   |
| Figure 11  | Map of New Providence Island showing the locations of <i>Clifton</i><br>and <i>Tusculum</i> plantations and Nassau, the capital city ..... | 67   |
| Figure 12  | Site map showing components of <i>Clifton</i> plantation. The slave<br>house with the ship graffito is here designated as building L ..... | 68   |
| Figure 13  | Eastern elevation of slave house L indicating the location of the<br>graffito .....  | 69   |
| Figure 14a | Photograph of Sloop A graffito on the window jamb of a slave<br>house at <i>Clifton</i> .....  | 69   |
| Figure 14b | Tracing of Sloop A graffito, <i>Clifton</i> plantation .....   | 70   |
| Figure 15  | Tracing of the hull of a vessel, Graffito Z, <i>Tusculum</i> main house .....  | 71   |

|            | Page   |
|------------|--|
| Figure 16  | Tracing of Schooner A graffito from <i>Tusculum</i> main house .....72   |
| Figure 17  | Map of the city of Nassau showing the locations of two ship<br>graffiti sites .....73  |
| Figure 18  | Plan of Fort Charlotte showing the locations of two<br>ship graffiti .....74   |
| Figure 19a | Photograph of Warship A graffito inside Fort Charlotte .....74   |
| Figure 19b | Tracing of Warship A graffito to enhance details .....75   |
| Figure 20a | Photo of Warship B on west wall of ravelin to Fort Charlotte .....76   |
| Figure 20b | Computer-generated tracing of Warship B graffito .....76   |
| Figure 21  | This building was the town's jail from 1799 to 1873. Ever since,<br>it has housed the city's library and first museum collection .....78 |
| Figure 22  | The basement cell is the only room in the building with any<br>historic graffiti .....78   |
| Figure 23a | Sloop B rigged with a fore and aft main and fore sails .....79   |
| Figure 23b | Sloop B's outline enhanced electronically .....79  |
| Figure 24a | Eroded graffito on lower west wall depicting Schooner B .....81  |
| Figure 24b | Traced outline of Schooner B .....81   |
| Figure 25a | Brigantine A on upper portion of west wall .....83   |
| Figure 25b | Tracing of Brigantine A, upper west wall of the cell .....83   |
| Figure 26a | Schooner C, also on the west wall, includes mast shrouds for<br>the two masts .....85  |
| Figure 26b | Tracing of Schooner C shows details of sails and rigging .....85   |
| Figure 27a | Graffiti of a two-masted schooner (top) and a vessel that appears<br>to have a fore sail as well as two smoke funnels .....87            |
| Figure 27b | Tracings of graffito for Schooner D and an apparent Steam<br>Schooner .....87  |

|            | Page  |
|------------|---|
| Figure 28a | Graffito of what appears to be a schooner. Schooner E .....89   |
| Figure 28b | Tracing of Schooner E .....89   |
| Figure 29a | Graffito of Schooner F, upper section of west wall .....91  |
| Figure 29b | Tracing of Schooner F, near the south west corner of the<br>cell wall .....91   |
| Figure 30a | Graffito of Sloop C, high on west wall .....92  |
| Figure 30b | Tracing of Sloop C from the upper west wall ..... 92  |
| Figure 31a | Graffito depicting possible Shallop. Graffito X, above right,<br>shows several ships docked. Graffito Y, above left, was too<br>heavily eroded to interpret .....94 |
| Figure 31b | Tracing of possible Shallop A surrounded by other heavily<br>eroded or unusual graffiti .....94   |
| Figure 32a | Eroded graffito, on lower south wall, depicting Schooner G .....96  |
| Figure 32b | Tracing of Schooner G from lower south wall of basement<br>cell .....96   |
| Figure 33a | Graffito of Brigantine B .....98  |
| Figure 33b | Tracing of Brigantine B graffito .....98  |
| Figure 34a | Graffito of Sloop D, upper south wall .....99   |
| Figure 34b | Tracing of Sloop D graffito .....99   |
| Figure 35  | Tracing of Schooner H graffito, upper portion of east wall .....101   |
| Figure 36  | Map of San Salvador showing the locations of the three sites<br>with documented ship graffiti on the island .....102  |
| Figure 37a | Photo of Schooner I graffito on <i>Sandy Point</i> main house .....103  |
| Figure 37b | Tracing of Schooner I, west wall of <i>Sandy Point</i> main house .....103  |
| Figure 38a | Photo of Schooner J graffito, work/storage building .....105  |

|            | Page   |
|------------|--|
| Figure 38b | Tracing of Schooner J graffito .....105  |
| Figure 39a | Schooner K graffito is located on the wall near a window<br>with more ship graffiti .....107 |
| Figure 39b | Tracing of Schooner K graffito, <i>Sandy Point</i> .....107                                  |
| Figure 40  | Tracing of Schooner L, <i>Sandy Point</i> estate .....109                                    |
| Figure 41  | Tracings of Schooner M (top) and Sloop E (below) .....110                                    |
| Figure 42a | Photograph of Sloop F graffito on the window jamb .....111                                   |
| Figure 42b | Tracing of Sloop F graffito, <i>Sandy Point</i> estate .....111                              |
| Figure 43a | Photograph of Schooner N graffito on wall near window .....112                               |
| Figure 43b | Tracing of Schooner N graffito, <i>Sandy Point</i> estate .....112                           |
| Figure 44a | Ship graffiti on window jamb crossed out .....114  |
| Figure 44b | Graffito of a schooner on the wall near window and<br>crossed out later .....114             |
| Figure 45a | Photo of a number of incomplete ship graffiti at<br><i>Sandy Point</i> estate .....116       |
| Figure 45b | Tracing of incomplete ship graffiti crossed out .....116                                     |
| Figure 46a | Photo of Schooner O, main house kitchen, <i>Prospect Hill</i> ,<br>San Salvador .....118     |
| Figure 46b | Tracing of Schooner O, <i>Prospect Hill</i> plantation,<br>San Salvador .....118             |
| Figure 47a | Photo of Sloop G graffito, main house kitchen,<br><i>Prospect Hill</i> .....120              |
| Figure 47b | Tracing of Sloop G .....120  |
| Figure 48a | Photo of Schooner P graffito, <i>Prospect Hill</i> , San Salvador .....122                   |
| Figure 48b | Tracing of Schooner P graffito .....122  |

|            | Page   |
|------------|--|
| Figure 49a | Photo of Sloop H graffito, main house kitchen,<br><i>Prospect Hill</i> .....124          |
| Figure 49b | Tracing of Sloop H graffito, <i>Prospect Hill</i> plantation .....124                    |
| Figure 50a | Photo of ship graffiti montage, interior kitchen wall,<br><i>Prospect Hill</i> .....126  |
| Figure 50b | Tracings of overlapping ship graffiti, <i>Prospect Hill</i> .....126                     |
| Figure 51a | Graffiti of Schooners Q and R, <i>Prospect Hill</i> main house .....128                  |
| Figure 51b | Tracings of Schooners Q (left) and R (right) graffiti .....128                           |
| Figure 52a | Two ship graffiti on main house, <i>Prospect Hill</i> .....130                           |
| Figure 52b | Tracings of Sloop I (left) and Schooner S (right) .....130                               |
| Figure 53  | San Salvador jail - Ship graffito is only in the cell on<br>the left .....132            |
| Figure 54a | Photo of Schooner T graffito, San Salvador jail cell .....132                            |
| Figure 54b | Tracing of Schooner T graffito .....133  |
| Figure 55  | Graffito of Sloop J, San Salvador jail .....134  |
| Figure 56  | Tracing of Sloop K graffito .....136   |
| Figure 57  | Tracing of 20th century graffito, Sloop L .....137                                       |
| Figure 58  | Graffito of Sloop M .....138   |
| Figure 59  | Tracing of Sloop N graffito .....139   |
| Figure 60  | Detail of the Turks & Caicos Islands, southern end of the<br>Bahama archipelago .....140 |
| Figure 61  | Location of graffiti sites on Providenciales Island .....141                             |
| Figure 62a | Photo of Sloop O, <i>Cheshire Hall</i> main house .....141                               |
| Figure 62b | Tracing of Sloop O from <i>Cheshire Hall</i> main house porch .....142                   |

|            | Page  |
|------------|---|
| Figure 63a | Photo of an eroded Schooner U graffito, <i>Cheshire Hall</i> .....143                             |
| Figure 63b | Tracing of Schooner U graffito, <i>Cheshire Hall</i> .....143                                     |
| Figure 64  | Casts of Sapodilla Hill ship graffiti, Schooner V (top) and Schooner W (below) .....145           |
| Figure 65  | Map of North Caicos Island showing location of <i>Wade's Green</i> plantation .....147            |
| Figure 66  | Site map of <i>Wade's Green</i> plantation showing location of graffiti site .....148             |
| Figure 67a | Photo of ship graffiti at second floor level of kitchen building, <i>Wade's Green</i> .....149    |
| Figure 67b | Computer-generated tracing of Sloop P (top), Sloop Q (below), and Schooner X (left) .....149      |
| Figure 68a | Photograph of the heavily eroded graffito of Schooner Y, window jamb of kitchen building .....151 |
| Figure 68b | Computer-generated tracing of Schooner Y, <i>Wade's Green</i> , North Caicos .....151             |
| Figure 69  | Tracing of Schooner Z graffito .....153   |
| Figure 70  | Tracing of Sloop R graffito .....154  |
| Figure 71  | Map showing ship graffiti sites on Crooked Island, Bahamas .....155                               |
| Figure 72  | Map showing location of graffiti site at <i>Marine Farm</i> plantation .....156                   |
| Figure 73  | Location of ship graffiti at <i>Great Hope</i> Estate, Crooked Island .....157                    |
| Figure 74a | Ship graffiti from the second floor of the <i>Great Hope</i> main house .....158                  |
| Figure 74b | Tracings of ship graffiti on main house at <i>Great Hope</i> plantation .....158                  |

|            | Page   |
|------------|--|
| Figure 75a | Photo of Schooner CC graffito, second floor, <i>Great Hope</i><br>plantation main house .....162 |
| Figure 75b | Tracing of Schooner CC graffito, <i>Great Hope</i> plantation .....162                           |
| Figure 76a | Photo of Schooner DD graffito, first floor of <i>Great Hope</i><br>main house .....163           |
| Figure 76b | Tracing of Schooner DD graffito from the <i>Great Hope</i><br>main house .....163                |
| Figure 77  | Tracing of a fore and aft sail, <i>Great Hope</i> estate .....165                                |
| Figure 78  | Map of the Abacos showing locations of ship graffiti<br>sites .....166                           |
| Figure 79  | Map of New Plymouth, Green Turtle Cay, Abaco,<br>showing location of ship graffiti site .....167 |
| Figure 80  | Site map showing area where slate fragment with ship<br>graffito was excavated .....168          |
| Figure 81a | Photo of Sloop W graffito on slate fragment .....169   |
| Figure 81b | Tracings of Sloop W on front face (left) and reverse<br>side (right) of slate fragment .....169  |
| Figure 82a | Photo of Ketch A graffito on a rock face in a cave at<br>Hole-in-the-Wall, Abaco .....171        |
| Figure 82b | Computer-generated tracing of Ketch A graffito .....171  |
| Figure 83a | Photo of Schooner EE graffito, Hole-in-the-Wall cave,<br>Abaco .....173                          |
| Figure 83b | Tracing of Schooner EE graffito .....173   |
| Figure 84a | Photo of Sloop X graffito, Hole-in-the-Wall cave .....175  |
| Figure 84b | Tracing of Sloop X graffito .....175   |
| Figure 85  | Photo of a ship graffito made with <i>guano</i> ,<br>Hole-in-the-Wall cave, Abaco .....176       |

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION - REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### The Research Challenge

The challenge in studying the incised ship graffiti found on various buildings in the Bahamas is not in the interpretation of them as different ship types. Instead, the real challenge is to identify and interpret their meaning and to answer such questions as “why were they drawn?” “why were they drawn in these locations?” and “who were the artists?” Any number of sources could be used to identify the type of ship and time period, based on construction and rigging details, even from the works of contemporary artists who probably had varying levels of knowledge about sailing vessels.

The works included here are intended to provide a sample of illustrations of ships built between the late 18th and early 20th centuries. Available sources, however, mainly cover only North America and Great Britain. Gleason’s (1936) work is on 19th century shipbuilding in Medford, Massachusetts. Some of the illustrations used by Armour and Lackey (1975) are spar and sail plans of Canadian ships built in the late 18th to early 20th centuries. These would be especially helpful for comparing the outlines of Bahamian ship graffiti. Three of the other references focus on the work of artists for the same time period. Cordingly (1973) looks at British artists while Stein (1975) deals particularly with American vessels and Ward-Jackson (1978) includes American and British works, but only for the 19th century. Wilson’s (1986) work on historic marine flags was added because some of the graffiti depict flags and pennants.

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This thesis follows the style of the journal, *Historical Archaeology*.

A search through the scholarly literature on nautical archaeology produced a number of articles, theses and one book on nautical iconography, which includes ship graffiti. The aim of these studies, however, is mainly to extrapolate details of hull construction and rigging in order to understand the timeline for the development of shipbuilding techniques. For earlier periods, up to and including medieval times, iconography is acknowledged as a useful source, despite some drawbacks on interpretation, for information that would be otherwise unattainable since few pertinent documents exist and archaeological examples are also rare.

Scholars acknowledge that there are limitations on the use of iconography in academic research and some, such as Sally Humphreys (1978), advise caution in relying too heavily on artistic representations for details on ships. Common problems include determining what is realistic and separating the artist's interpretation from actual ship details. Ray (1992) also notes problems caused by changes made to the image in past maintenance efforts. Casado Soto (1998) lists abstraction, simplification, stylization, copying, and imagination as possible sources of distortion in interpreting and understanding contemporary illustrations of ships.

In view of these drawbacks, researchers support their discussion of ship graffiti by comparisons with contemporary examples and references to firmly dated events or periods. Langdon and Van de Moortel (1997) describe fifteen ship graffiti discovered along the coast south of Athens, Greece. The engravings, which include six to eight longships, two merchantmen and a few other types of vessels, were given a *terminus ante quem* of 500 BC based on their construction styles and some associated inscriptions. Lucien Basch (1989) considers the rigging details on two ship graffiti from a tomb in

Alexandria as evidence of a development phase of rigging in antiquity. From construction details he dates them between circa 270 BC and the reign of Augustus. In her research, Zaraza Friedman (1999), surveyed ship iconography of Israel and Jordan, in the eastern Mediterranean, to learn more about types of vessels depicted only on mosaics. Sean Kingsley (1997) relied on setting an historical context and comparison with contemporary, dated illustrations, to determine a date of circa AD 150 – 250 for an Utica graffito originally from a step at a harbor, in this Roman outpost in modern Tunisia.

Of the graffiti examples from medieval Europe, Lawrence Mott (1990) argues that the ship graffito he dates circa 1350, from Barcelona's Palau Reial, reflected technological changes which allowed Catalan to expand and consolidate its regional influence. In another article, Mott (1994) touts a small ink drawing, from a 14th to 15th century ordinance book in a Barcelona archive, as the earliest dated illustration of a three-masted ship. Lillian Ray's (1992) thesis is a survey of medieval art, from the area around Venice, with depictions of ships and boats dating before the late 15th century. The catalogue in her thesis does not include the examples of graffiti surveyed. These are only included in the book based on her thesis (Ray Martin 2001). There are nine examples from a San Marcos church and one from a prison cell in the Ducal Palace. Violet Pritchard (1987) gives details of five ship graffiti, dating from the 13th to 15th centuries, found in several English churches. McGrail and Farrell (1979) investigate ethnographic examples of rowing to support their interpretations of ship iconography.

The above references generally approach the subject from a very technical viewpoint. Few references are made to the people whose lives these ships impacted except to criticize the artists for omitting or misinterpreting details. Thijs J. Maarleveld (1995)

argues that studying technical detail in ship construction “provides us with an exceptional opportunity to understand past thinking, concepts and decisions.” This article was presented in response to criticism by J. Hawkes (as quoted in Maarleveld 1995) that the field of nautical archaeology “is too technical and too jargon-ridden; even that such a technical study can hardly be the ‘proper study of mankind’.” Hawkes’ comments were published in 1968. While this may certainly no longer be a valid critique of archaeological ship finds, the study of nautical iconography has remained specifically a source of technical information to inform the broader field of nautical archaeology. The contention of this research is that even nautical iconography such as ship graffiti contain layers of cultural information that are ignored and discarded in the single-minded search for technological details.

All of the reports in the literature on nautical archaeology refer to graffiti from medieval Europe or classical Greece. In view of the apparently current perception that studying ship graffiti is only useful to glean details on the development of shipbuilding technology, it is possible that nautical archaeologists researching in the Americas see no need to study graffiti of European-style ships in the New World. Any of these drawings would be later than 1492. From the mid-16th century onward, other documentary evidence such as treatises, paintings, ship’s logs and journals became more common. These sources, in addition to the study of archaeological ship remains, provide increasingly greater detail about the development of shipbuilding techniques.

Since the only references to ship graffiti in the Americas have been reported by non-archaeologists, it is surmised that nautical archaeologists are either unaware of these examples or have seen no research value in studying them. Jonathan Scott (1992), a

professor of art and architectural history, described ship graffiti he discovered in the process of restoring 17th and 18th century buildings in Martha's Vineyard. The ships were carved into floorboards, as well as on interior and exterior walls. Other examples of ship graffiti from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil are mentioned by Robert Farris Thompson (2002), a professor of History at Yale University, from the work of 19th century artist, Johann Moritz Rugendas. Thompson surmises that newly arrived Africans made these drawings.

Although the material on nautical iconography proved to be not as helpful as anticipated, another concept that is pertinent to this research topic was discovered in the literature. Nautical archaeologists surveying the coast of Swedish Norrland (1975-1980) coined the term "maritime cultural landscape" to refer to "human utilization (economy) of maritime space by boat: settlement, fishing, hunting, shipping and its attendant sub-cultures, such as pilotage, lighthouse and seamark maintenance." (Westerdahl 1992). By this concept, the wider context for interpreting ship graffiti is to consider them as part of the maritime cultural landscape. Including ship graffiti within the maritime cultural landscape would also facilitate any assessment of their relative cultural significance.

In his study of medieval Bristol as a maritime cultural landscape, A.J. Parker (1999) mentions a church that has ship graffiti. His brief note provided a much-needed cultural perspective on how these drawings fit into the wider cultural landscape connecting human activity both on land and water. This principle can, in turn, be used to help interpret the maritime cultural landscape of which Bahamian ship graffiti were a part. Understanding that these drawings were part of a larger landscape between land and sea is only the first step in revealing their cultural significance or meaning.

## **Theoretical Approach**

The theoretical framework for this research is the inter-disciplinary material culture approach. The essence of material culture studies is to uncover the meaning and cultural context of an artifact. Since much of this culturally defined meaning is not verbalized or written, the main challenge for scholars studying material culture remains to appropriately interpret this meaning. According to Henry Glassie (1999) the most effective means of perceiving cultural meaning is to understand the history of material culture objects from the perspective of the makers rather than simply imposing arbitrary academic constructs. In order to follow Glassie's method, the researcher must have some understanding of who these people would be.

In her book, *The Age of Homespun*, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich (2001) demonstrates what a vivid perspective of contemporary life could be achieved by sifting through the details of any available documents and related artifacts. She includes not only written documents but also oral history accounts and, most importantly, she treats the artifacts under examination as "texts" as well. Used in conjunction with the two other types of information sources, her research illustrates how much critical detail can be further gleaned by paying attention to the methods of manufacture, materials used and even the manufacturing style.

This type of research method is echoed in Thomas Schlereth's concept of "above-ground archaeology" which he terms, "the history of the land." Researchers using this method would view "material objects and physical sites as primary evidence" (1980). These are the techniques I intend to employ to determine what kind of cultural meaning was ascribed to the incised ship images found throughout the Bahamian archipelago.

Meanwhile, the same methods must first be used to help decide who the makers of these images were. Based on their locations in such varied spots as interior and exterior walls of plantation work-buildings, a slave house, the walls of a basement cell in a 19th century jail, and on a fort manned by liberated black troops throughout the 19th century, it is assumed that most, if not all, of these drawings were created by people of African heritage. All research questions must therefore be addressed from the perspective of New World transformations of an African worldview.

Archaeologists' concern with context helps heighten the realization that artifacts embody layers of meaning which can only effectively be uncovered using sources and methods borrowed from other disciplines (Smart Martin 1996). This is especially relevant when attempting to investigate evidence of slave life and surviving elements of African cultural traditions (Samford 1996). Michael Schiffer and Andrea Miller (1999) went a step further in proposing an expanded definition of communication designed to meet the requirements of archaeology. Their definition stipulates that a person can secure information from "any performance of any interactor that he or she can register." By this definition it follows that a person can make informed assumptions about current or past human behavior based on the juxtaposition of artifacts in a particular context. Such a definition not only recognizes the presence and validity of information sources affecting all five senses but also acknowledges the validity of inferences about human activity that can be made based on the use of these sources.

Schiffer's and Miller's archaeological definition of communication ties in well with the ideas of cultural geography and environment-behavior studies. Scholars in these fields have noted the relationship between human behavior and the built environment and

their ideas carry important implications for examining sites with ship graffiti in the Bahamas. Fred Kniffen (1974), a cultural geographer, notes that there is often a direct relationship between social structure and the structure of settlement pattern. For Newton (1974) settlement patterns are the largest, most complex artifacts of material culture, while J. M. Houston (1971) makes the point that the landscape reveals the social and economic history of a region. According to Pierce Lewis (1979), the human landscape is “an unwitting autobiography” reflecting our values, tastes, aspirations, and even fears in tangible and visible form. D. W. Meinig (1979) is not as dramatic but draws a similar conclusion. John B. Jackson (1984) argues that some societies organize every aspect of the natural environment to serve human needs.

In archaeological terms, buildings and use areas can play a more pivotal role in the interpretation of a site than is often recognized. As Judy Attfield (2000) notes, although disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and psychoanalysis are helpful they still seem inadequate when dealing with physical things. Gritzner and Gritzner (1983) are archaeologists who believe that historical archaeological research could especially benefit from greater attention to the spatial analysis which examines the interrelationship between cultural artifacts and their natural environmental contexts. Donald Sanders (1990) extends this point to argue that if the codification of conventional behavior is reflected in the organization of the built environment then archaeologists can learn about ancient behavior by studying ancient architecture. He refers specifically to ancient sites but the same principle can be applied to the 19th century Bahamian context.

It is further acknowledged that the built environment is intended to reflect and communicate social divisions such as status, power, labor and gender roles (Kent 1990,

Rapoport 1990). Yet another point that is significant for this research is Rapoport's delineation of the cultural use of space into systems of activities and systems of settings. Understanding this distinction is intended to allow the researcher to address the question of "Who does what, where, when, including or excluding whom (and why)" for any human use area.

### **Relevance of Folklore Sources**

Folklore, the next field discussed, is more specifically related to the research topic of Bahamian ship graffiti. Since one of the assumptions regarding this topic is that the folk artists were of African heritage, the folklore literature reviewed focuses on ethnicity and African cultural transformations in the New World. Steven Horvath (1983) points out that the term, ethnicity, is valid only when two or more different groups of people participate in the same social system. He quotes a number of anthropological and sociological studies which state that the material culture profile of any ethnic group changes over time in response to changes in the balance of power between ethnic groups. In addition, ethnic groups tend to reconfigure old culture traits and also develop new ways rather than retain culture traits in their original form.

Next is an investigation of folklore sources on African cultural transformations. Despite the number of anthropological sources Horvath referenced for definitions of ethnicity and ethnic group, Abrahams and Szwed find inadequate models of culture contact and any resultant change when considering contact between Europeans and Africans in the New World. The encounter is too often viewed mainly from the perspective of the politically and economically dominant group, under the assumption

that the culture of the dominant group would eventually prevail also. Instead, Abrahams and Szwed provide documentary historical evidence to demonstrate that, “There were certain areas of culture in which the planters found it convenient not only **not** [emphasis added] to attempt to eliminate African-style practices but in fact, to encourage them. This was especially so in such noninstitutional dimensions of culture as work practices, ways of playing, and systems of magical practices and curing. ... Wherever Afro-Americans could interact with one another (whether or not in the presence of Euro-Americans) there emerged a set of expectations, attitudes, and feelings which in great part derived from past practices. These encounters would naturally draw upon the shared experiences in Africa and the New World.” (1983:3).

Leland Ferguson finds a similar pattern in his archaeological examination of early African America, particularly with regard to house form and construction techniques. He goes on to make an observation which is critical for the interpretation of the Bahamian ship graffiti. Ferguson states, “White America’s cultural tradition is derived primarily from Britain and northern Europe, where cold weather encouraged people to live inside their houses. Our modern addiction to central heat and air conditioning has reinforced the tendency to think of living in our houses. In contrast, in much of Africa and other tropical and subtropical regions, people live around their houses as much as in them.” (1992:69).

Apart from these references, the literature on African cultural retentions is of little use for this research topic. John Michael Vlach (1978) and Robert Farris Thompson (1983) have both done extensive study on the transference of African cultural traditions to the New World. Nevertheless, their work is not an exhaustive assessment of African

cultural retentions in the New World. Their study areas are dominated by examples from the United States and Brazil, the countries with the largest populations of African descent. For the Caribbean, examples are predominantly from the larger island countries, Cuba and Haiti, with occasional cases cited from a few of the small islands.

For over 300 years, from the early 16th century to the late 19th century, enslaved Africans from a number of ethnic groups were transported to islands of the Caribbean, the east coast of North America, and to coastal areas of Central and South America. Social and economic conditions were as varied as the many places Africans were taken to, therefore it should not be expected that African cultural retentions and new traditions developed be standard throughout the area of the African diaspora.

The type of ship graffiti in the Bahamas appears to be unique among people of African heritage. Vlach (1978; 2002) and Thompson (2002) assume that any boating or boat-building skills Africans displayed in the New World were inherited from those Africans captured in territory near rivers or along the coast. They also assume that all of these people would have been familiar with making and sailing small boats and canoes. However, of the millions of Africans captured and shipped to the New World, those arriving with African boating skills would have been a minority.

In his 18th century memoirs, Olaudah Equiano (1789) recounted his capture and journey of some months to the coast where he was loaded onto a European vessel. He had never seen a large river, the ocean, or a European ship, which he described as “this hollow place.” Yet, during his years as a slave, Equiano was sold to a naval officer at which time he became a sailor. Although recent research indicates Equiano was born in Carolina and not Africa, the theory is that he gathered his material from fellow slaves

who had endured these experiences (Boyce 2003). Other contemporary sources support accounts similar to those recorded by Equiano. Thomas Canot (1854), a 19th century slaver on the west coast of Africa, recounts land journeys deep into the interior, one to the kingdom of Fouta Djallon in present day Guinea, where a variety of African produce, including slaves, was sent by caravan to be traded on the coast. In the Bahamas, Abul Keli, an Ibo nobleman literate in Arabic, liberated from a slave ship by the Royal Navy in 1831, recounted his saga in three letters to the Governor thanking British authorities for allowing him to be set free again (*The Bahama Argus 1831*).

The work of Vlach and Thompson currently does not account for cases such as Equiano's or the Bahamian ship graffiti. Equiano's historical account adds credence to the fact that Africans in the New World were taught European-style boatbuilding and sailing skills as part of their tasks as slaves. Related African cultural transformations in the Americas would be overlooked by Vlach's and Thompson's assessments. As Abrahams and Szwed have suggested, unless Africans are seen as active participants helping to shape New World cultural forms, the full extent of their participation in this process would inevitably be overlooked. This point of view suggests that despite the fact that enslaved Africans were the lowest social order in the Americas, this did not preclude their having some ability to shape the development of the society they, and their descendents, had to live in.

Cultural anthropologists have generally steered clear of Caribbean societies and their slave pasts. Sidney Mintz's tone in his book, *Caribbean Transformations*, (1974) is decidedly patronizing and apologist for a work written so late in the 20th century. Caribbean anthropologist, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1992) argues that the region remains

an “open frontier of cultural anthropology.” He contends that the Caribbean presents many “fuzzy boundaries” for anthropologists. It does not fit neatly into academic categories as the West/non-West dichotomy, the concept of the “native,” and simple versus complex societies.

### **Sources from the Field of History**

The most relevant works in the field of history are books by James Barker Farr (*Black Odyssey* 1991) and William Jeffrey Bolster’s dissertation (*African-American Seamen* 1991), as well as the book that was published from it (*Black Jacks* 1998). Both authors researched the role of black sailors in the 18th and 19th centuries. Although their primary research interests were African American sailors they also made frequent references to other black seamen the Americans encountered in the Caribbean, the rest of the Americas and also in Africa. They note the differences characterizing each area. In the Caribbean, there was a majority African population, and sailing was mainly the relatively short distances between islands.

Bolster’s research goes into more detail; he mentions some important data for the Bahamas, such as the percentage of male slaves (almost 16%) involved in shipping (1998). This was possibly the highest percentage in the region. In his dissertation he cites the unusual amount of freedom allowed Bermudian slaves engaged in wrecking in the southern portion of the Bahamian archipelago (1991). This historical information supports the assumption that people of African heritage were heavily involved in shipping in the Bahamas.

## **Research Hypothesis**

Based on the review of the literature, I have formulated a working hypothesis for this research. It is assumed that the creators of the ship graffiti were African, or of African descent and had extensive knowledge of European ship types. Yet depictions of similar ships are not found in other cultural contexts in the Bahamas, such as on piece spreads or as grave decoration. The site-specific nature of these drawings would suggest that the drawings and any related activity was gender-based, i.e. male. Particularly during the period of slavery, tasks on a plantation were usually gender-specific. While Black women would have worked in the kitchen, around the house and in the fields, it is highly unlikely that women were assigned jobs building or sailing boats.

A number of the graffiti are on work/storage buildings, on walls of the planter's house, in jail cells, inside a cave, and on the walls of a fort. While only the fort would have been an exclusively male work area, the presence/absence of ship graffiti on kitchen buildings is most revealing. At one plantation graffiti site where there were two kitchens, the drawings are only present on interior and exterior walls of one kitchen but none at the other. This is despite the fact that the kitchen building with no drawings has a better view of the ocean than both buildings at this site where the drawings were made. Such distinctions would indicate that the drawings were done by people who had reason to be in and around certain buildings on the estate. The incidence of ship graffiti in several kinds of locales could also suggest that these drawings were intended to record some economically important activity that the artists took part in. Seafaring and shipping were as important in the Bahamian economy as it was in Bermuda.

The drawings on the walls of plantation buildings seem so unusual because they appear to be misplaced. However, these plantations were occupied by two ethnic groups with differing perceptions on the division of living and work space. It would be expected that those of European descent would center their activities inside their buildings, while those of African descent would consider the yard area outside and between buildings as legitimate parts of their activity area. Even though European Bahamians were the dominant group and they owned the buildings, enslaved Africans were allowed to participate in local shipping as part of a plantation's economy. Consequently, African-Bahamians could maintain shipping records wherever and in whatever manner they deemed appropriate. Therefore I would argue that the African cultural transformation illustrated in these ship graffiti is not the drawing but the location of those drawings mainly on exterior walls of buildings and on window jambs.

Considering the importance of their work to a plantation's economic survival, the artists were allowed to rely on their African-derived concept of useable living and work space in recording their work, even when it was on the second-storey verandah of the master's house. The existence of ship graffiti from classical Greece, medieval Europe and colonial New England are evidence that the practice of creating such drawings is not unique to African heritage. In the case of these drawings, I also suggest that what is of African heritage is the cultural interpretation on how living and work spaces are used.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORY OF THE BAHAMIAN MARITIME LANDSCAPE

#### **Introduction**

Part of the argument for the cultural significance of Bahamian ship graffiti is that the geography of the islands (Figure 1) made it feasible for seafaring to remain an important cultural feature for any inhabitants of the Bahamas. Creating ship graffiti was not a standard cultural phenomenon for the Lucayans, the original inhabitants of the Bahamas. While ship graffiti was not a major part of the Lucayan maritime cultural landscape it is nonetheless important to extend the historical background so far back to establish the point that maritime activity was always an important aspect of any culture developed in the Bahamian archipelago. With the arrival of Europeans and Africans, shipping played a major role in Bahamian life.

The last ship graffiti in the catalogue (on page 176) is interpreted as a pre-Colombian creation because it differs from the historic period graffiti in two important aspects. First, it was painted onto the rock surface inside a cave with a paste of bat *guano* instead of being incised into the surface like all historic period Bahamian ship graffiti were drawn. Secondly, this ship graffiti shows a different perspective of the vessel recorded. It shows the ship from the front and so only gives an abbreviated view of the bow and the foremast with its sail. This differs from the historic period ship graffiti which all show a side view of each vessel to illustrate a full profile of the ship's hull, spars, and sails. The Lucayans could not regard ships in the same way as the 19th and 20th century graffiti artists who were trained in the construction and sailing of European-style vessels. For Lucayans, not only were these vessels foreign objects, but Lucayan

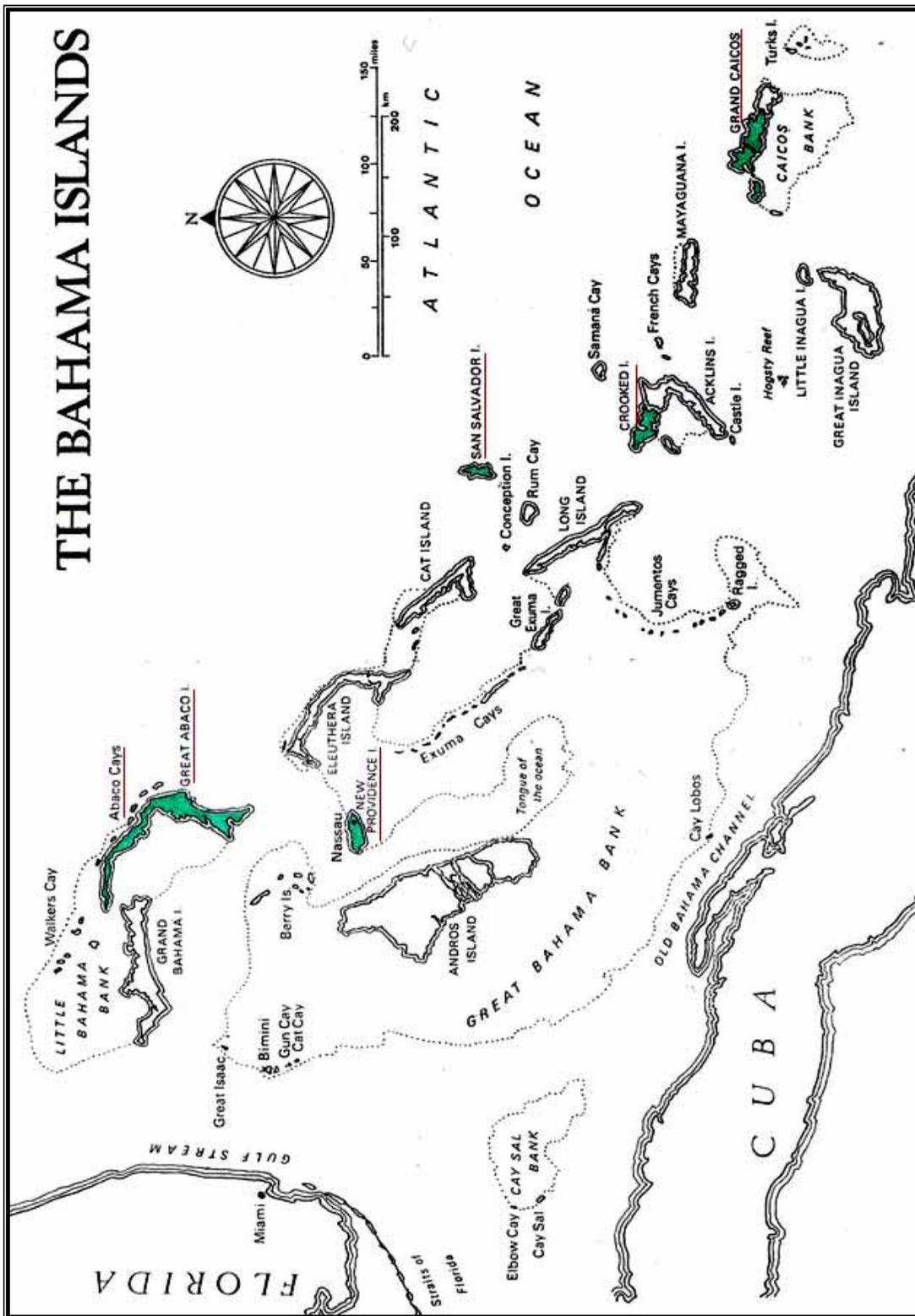


FIGURE 1. Map of the Bahamas, including the Turks & Caicos Islands. (Adapted from Hunte 1975.)

interaction with these objects of an alien culture was markedly different from that of Bahamian ship graffiti artists several centuries later. The end result is a different style of ship graffiti.

### **Lucayans**

The Lucayans were a sub-cultural group of Taino Arawaks who migrated from Hispaniola about AD 600 and from Cuba by AD 700-800 (Granberry 1995; Berman 1994). They represented the most northerly outpost of Taino migration into the Caribbean from the Orinoco Basin in South America. Over the two millennia in the Caribbean they had to make cultural adjustments from living in a landscape dominated by a system of rivers within a vast jungle to small island life surrounded by open sea (Keegan 1997:17).

At the northernmost edge of the Caribbean Sea, Lucayan adaptation to life in the Bahamas was necessarily focused on the sea simply because the land had so little to offer. Archaeological evidence of the Lucayan diet suggests a higher reliance on seafood than in other Caribbean islands. Their boating skills and fishing techniques allowed them to harvest anything from small fish and shellfish found in shallow, shoreline waters to large, deep water fish, and turtles. This was supplemented with land animals such as iguana, hutia (a small rodent), and a variety of birds (Berman 1994:5-10; Keegan 1992:168).

Much of the array of tools, utensils, and personal adornments are predominantly shell (mainly *Strombus gigas*), fish bone, and staghorn coral (*Acropora cervicornis*). Recognizable stone implements are rare since the locally available limestone is a relatively soft stone. Although Lucayans may have used it for some tools these would

not have been very durable. Imported stone implements made of igneous rock are therefore easily distinguished. Limited resources on land meant the Lucayans relied more heavily on what was offered by the sea.

An element of the Lucayan maritime cultural landscape which may be unique in the Caribbean was their use of blue holes (these are submerged caverns found on land and in the ocean. Those on land are connected to the ocean by subterranean passages). Caves were important spiritual and ceremonial sites for Taino throughout the Caribbean but Lucayan cultural adaptations in the Bahamas suggest that they used caves more widely than elsewhere in the Caribbean. It appears that Lucayans preferred to bury their dead in caves. Of all Lucayan burials found in the Bahamas only one was not in a cave (the National Museum of the Bahamas holds the remains of between 20-30 Lucayans). Apart from the Bahamas and Bermuda, blue holes are relatively rare in the island Caribbean. In the Bahamas Lucayans incorporated a feature of the maritime environment that was little-known elsewhere in the Caribbean; Bermuda had no pre-Colombian population.

A team of British geologists happened upon two blue hole burial sites on Andros Island. The remains of 16 individuals (9 men, 6 women and 1 child) were removed from the first blue hole along with the crania of two relatively small canines (the skulls of a cat and a pig were deemed intrusive as these animals are known to have been introduced by Europeans). Only one skeleton was observed in the second blue hole but it was not removed. What was taken from this site was a scale model of a Lucayan canoe. It was presumed to have been the funeral bier for the important Lucayan personage whose skeletal remains lay some distance below where the canoe was found, in two pieces,

wedged into a ledge of the cavern. Presumably it broke when it was being lowered into the blue hole.

In the first cavern, called *Sanctuary Blue Hole*, the remains of the 16 individuals were found about 80 feet (24m) from the water's surface (Palmer 1989:131). The canoe, from *Stargate Blue Hole*, was at a similar depth. At such depths there is no natural light in the cavern yet in neither site did it appear that the bodies were simply tossed into the water. It is uncertain how the bodies were lowered to their final resting places in each blue hole. What is known, though, is that Lucayans were such renowned divers the Spanish used them as enslaved divers in the pearl fisheries in the Margarita Islands off the Venezuelan coast (Keegan 1992:221-222).

Apart from this skill, the Spanish had no use for the distinct maritime cultural heritage Lucayans had created in the Bahama Islands. Just as they were the first people to meet the Europeans when they entered in 1492, so were they also the first cultural group devastated by this encounter. Within 20 years of the first voyage Lucayan settlements had been decimated by slaving raids. In 1513 Ponce de Leon passed through the entire archipelago searching for the legendary *Fountain of Youth*. On this voyage he recorded meeting only one old woman on Grand Bahama at the northern end of the island chain. A slaving expedition sent out from Cuba in 1521 reported finding no one (Keegan 1992:222). As a recognizably distinct cultural group the Lucayans were already dead. Dating of pre-Colombian archaeological sites in the Bahamas has supported this assumption of the demise of Lucayan culture by the early 16th century.

Grim reminders of the violent encounter of two worlds linger as part of the maritime cultural landscape within shipwrecks such as the early 16th century Spanish

wreck on the Molasses Reef at the southern end of the archipelago. This small vessel was heavily armed, carrying a variety of hand-held arms as well as heavy artillery. Also found was a pair of leg irons. All the circumstantial evidence as its wreck location, being heavily armed, and carrying leg irons suggest this could have been Spanish slaving ship searching for Lucayans. No definitive date could be given for this vessel but the possibility of it being a Lucayan slaving ship would help narrow its date to the 1520s or even earlier (Keith 1996:60, 63-64).

Even though the Lucayan people disappeared from the Bahamas, still part of their maritime cultural landscape remains in the names of the country and several of the islands. Ethnolinguistic research by Julian Granberry (1991:3-12) demonstrated that the Taino generally named islands based on directional references to the island, or place, they were moving from. Essentially, then, usual Taino island naming practices incorporated sailing directions to a new place. This evidence supports material culture finds, such as distinctive ceramics in their style and composition, from excavations indicating that the archipelago was inhabited by migrants from Cuba and Hispaniola (Keegan 1992:51-54).

By the time Europeans arrived the entire archipelago was known as *Lucayos* and the people who inhabited them were called *Lucayans*. Until the early 17th century the islands were routinely referred to on maps and in the literature as *Lucayos* (Mollat du Jourdin & de La Roncière 1984:No.55; Putman 1983:46-47). By the 1620s, when the British peremptorily claimed them, they were increasingly being called *the Bahamas*, and not *the Lucayos*. The claim by some historians that the name “Bahamas” comes from Spanish for “low seas” can be refuted by evidence from early maps of the New World (Craton 1962:43-44) as well as the findings of Granberry’s research (1991:9). In both

cases “Bahama” is given as the Lucayan name for the island now known as “Grand Bahama.” Granberry does not attempt an explanation of “Lucayos.”

### **European Settlement**

With the forced relocation of the Lucayans the archipelago was uninhabited for over 100 years. Initial European settlement began separating the islands as the Turks & Caicos at the southern end while the rest of the archipelago continued known as the Bahamas. Nevertheless, the entire archipelago maintained similar profiles of a maritime cultural landscape compared to the rest of the Caribbean. The first English settlers, the Eleutherian Adventurers, were Puritans who moved from Bermuda in 1648 seeking religious freedom. Colonists there were familiar with the Bahamian archipelago because they collected salt from the Turk & Caicos Islands. This differential treatment of two segments of the island chain eventually led to their separation as distinct political entities (Williams 1989:12-15).

As the Eleutherian Adventurers themselves were unfamiliar with Bahamian waters, their ship wrecked within sight of one of the islands they named Eleuthera. On landing they camped in a nearby cave. Archaeologically very little is known about early European settlement in the Bahamas. The only early settlement site excavated, to date, is this transitional living site in the cave. Confirming the location of this site was only possible from historical accounts of these colonists. In fact, the aim of the excavation was to test this account of their landing (Turner 1998:3). Food remains from this site, Preacher’s Cave, illustrate the process of adaptation to the available resources of this new

environment. For, while butchered pig and cow bones were found, there were also turtle bones and conch shell (*Strombus gigas*).

The shell remains are all in small fragments indicating that these early settlers smashed the shell to obtain the meat. This pattern is inconsistent with pre-Colombian and later methods of making a hole near the apex and cutting the muscle loose. These minor indicators allow some insight on the process these settlers went through in making a life in their new homeland. Their livelihood in these islands would be focused primarily on the sea and consisted of such transitory ventures as cutting dye wood, raking salt, catching turtles, collecting ambergris (a by-product from sperm whales), and salvaging wrecks (Albury 1980:42-45; Craton 1962:62). This remained the predominant economic pattern for the Bahamas over the next 200 years despite consistent attempts to change it.

This sea-based economy was not a high profit-yielding one so by 1670 administration of the Bahamas was transferred to the Lords Proprietors of the Carolinas. Governors appointed by the Lords Proprietors were authorized to issue licenses and collect revenues from this same list of maritime activities. Simultaneously they were ordered “to persuade the people to plant provisions and clear the ground for cattle and planting tobacco, indigo, and specially cotton.” (Calendar of State Papers, CSP vol.9:No.970, No.971).

The independent and casual nature of this seafaring economy, however, did not fit the usual perception of how an English colony was expected to develop. Critical assessments usually portrayed Bahamian settlers as lazy, good-for-nothings. Note John Dorrell’s 1660s opinion that Bahamian settlers preferred to “run acoasting in shallops

which is a lazy course of life and leaveth none but old men, women and children to plant” (Craton 1962:68).

### **Piracy**

Of these seafaring activities, salvaging shipwrecks was the most profitable but also the most controversial. The Spanish considered as piracy the salvage of their vessels by non-Spaniards. This contrasted with Bahamian settlers who regarded salvage as a prime economic opportunity. This discrepancy eventually culminated in two Spanish attacks in 1684 which destroyed the little town on New Providence (CSP vol.11:No.1927). Most of those who survived these attacks relocated to Jamaica but others joined small settlements scattered on Harbour Island and in the Abacos, prime areas for access to ships passing the islands. This localized charge of piracy by the Spanish was fueled by resentment over the establishment of colonies by other European states. This issue was settled with France by the Treaty of Ryswick, 1697. Spain only formally relinquished any claim to the Bahama Islands by signing the Treaty of Versailles, 1783. The treaty ended Spain’s one-year occupation of the Bahamas (Craton & Saunders 1992:64-65; Defoe 1724:50).

Yet by this time the problem had extended beyond local Bahamian salvors as international pirates began seeking refuge in the Bahamas. The most prominent case, in 1696, cost Governor Nicholas Trott his career. He was accused of accepting fees and gifts to allow Henry Every (or Avery), alias Bridgeman, to land at Nassau after plundering a ship in the Indian Ocean belonging to the Great Mogul of India. Governor Trott’s defense was that there was little he could do against Every’s 46-gun ship with a

crew of over 100 men (Craton 1962:86). Captain Every, in fact, had more than a casual interest in stopping at Nassau. Colonial Office records show that Every had a crew of 95 men; including four free Negroes, and “severall boys.” Of this crew, three were Bahamian and three others had Bahamian wives (Colonial Office series, CO5/1257/B16/00121-00122). Bahamians were now active participants in the wider seafaring arena of piracy.

The tiny colony seemed to attract attention far out of proportion to the value of its economy, but on closer examination it is apparent that the nature of this economy and the profile of settlers involved was the heart of the matter. Spanish and French forces attacked Nassau, the capital, on New Providence so often between 1700 and 1713 that administration of the town collapsed almost totally. In 1703 Edward Birch arrived as the new governor in the aftermath of a recent Spanish-French attack. He reported finding the survivors “without a shift to cover their nakedness” (Craton 1962:93). He was so overwhelmed by the devastation of the town that he left the Bahamas almost immediately and never returned. The islands had no appointed governor for the next 15 years. These attacks only directly affected New Providence. Settlers remained on Eleuthera, Harbour Island, Abaco and its nearby cays.

While Nassau may have been the administrative hub, it was certainly not critical to the colony's survival. The non-centralized, independent lifestyle and economy could easily shift and adapt as the need arose. Within the population was a full gamut of settlers, including the few like Thomas Walker, who relocated to Abaco in the aftermath of the Spanish and French attacks on New Providence. He described himself, in 1715, as “a pursuer prosecuter and disturber of pirates, robbers and villains that do expect to shelter themselves in these Islands.” (CSP vol.28:No.499). He was Deputy Governor when he

stated this and became Chief Justice under the first two Royal Governors. At the other end of the spectrum was the group of six Bahamians arrested by Walker for acts of piracy along the Cuban coast. They were crewmen under the renowned pirate, Benjamin Hornigold (CSP vol.28:No.276).

Pirates were attracted to the Bahamas for the same reason colonial officials consistently gave for Great Britain to hold onto these little islands at all costs. It was their strategic location at the junction of shipping lanes from North America to the Caribbean and from the Caribbean to Europe. As a colonial governor noted in a letter to the Council on Trade and Plantations, "they are by their scituation the key to the whole Gulph of Florida, so that whoever is master of them may if they please be master of all the Spanish and most of the French trade in these parts" (CSP vol.29:No.331). This observation was especially pertinent during the "Age of Sail" when ships were limited to specific routes to make use of favorable currents and winds.

Access and exit routes into the Caribbean were not all the same. While there were a number of entry points into the Caribbean Sea, exit channels were more limited. Of the four largest channels used to sail out of the Caribbean, two passed through or by the Bahamian archipelago. The centralized administration of Spain's New World empire required all treasure fleets to meet at Havana for their return voyage. Their route then took them through the Florida Straits and past the northern end of the Bahamas. The French used the Windward Passage round trip to Sainte Domingue. On the return voyage, however, they had to pass through the Bahamian archipelago to enter the powerful currents of the Gulf Stream which, along with favorable winds, greatly facilitated return voyages to Europe. In addition, ships from North America also used the

Windward Passage en route to the Caribbean and sailed through the Florida Straits on the way back (Colonial Office series, CO23/23/28).

With increasing pirate activity in the Bahamas, the Council on Trade and Plantations was recommending, for about 15 years, that administration of the islands become the responsibility of the Crown instead of the Lords Proprietors. The first Royal Governor arrived in 1718 with authority to pardon former pirates. In less than five years this situation was declared to be under control (Craton & Saunders 1992:118). The Bahamas continued rather quietly after this although the perception of these islands as a den of pirates lingered into the late 18th century (Physician 1968:17). Apart from the pirating interlude, the colony's economic profile remained unchanged with minimal agricultural activity contrasted with an array of free-ranging, mostly maritime ventures.

### **Plantations**

One major difference in this post-pirate economy was the extensive involvement of free people of color and slaves. From this period onward, a greater number and variety of sources delineate the predominantly maritime life ways of the archipelago. In a 1768 report on the state of affairs in the colony, Governor Shirley assesses the local population as, "great Numbers of the inhabitants being Blacks, Mulattoes and Persons, who live by Wrecking and Plunder and are People of a very bold daring Spirit, which makes it highly necessary to have a proper force to enable the Civil power to put their Laws in execution" (CO23/8:3-5). Wrecking, or the salvage of shipwrecks, as noted in this report, was the major source of income until the late 18th century.

Loyalist refugees fleeing the revolution in the American colonies migrated to the Bahamas, bringing with them their preferred economy of large-scale cotton production. The great expectation was that plantation agriculture would invigorate the local economy. The new arrivals snubbed the old inhabitants whom they disparagingly nicknamed "Conchs," presumably in reference to their seafaring lifestyle and common seafood (Culmer 1827:44; Saunders 1983:14). Yet within 20 years most Bahamian cotton plantations had failed and those Loyalist planters remaining in the Bahamas found themselves having to adopt these once demeaned life ways. In fact, the ruins of Loyalist-period plantations offer some of the most striking archaeological evidence of the Bahamas' maritime cultural landscape. The majority of ship graffiti from the Bahamas are on these plantation buildings.

At one of these plantations, *Clifton*, one of the seven slave houses has the image of a sloop inscribed on a window jamb. Similar ship graffiti are found all around the Bahamas. Most are on interior walls of plantation work buildings but on exterior walls of some planter's houses. These types of locations suggest they were drawn by people of African heritage: slaves, free people of color, and also their descendents as many plantations remained occupied well into the 20th century. Details on the ships indicate their creators were knowledgeable about ship construction (Wilkie & Farnsworth 1995:36). A check of local slave registers show that some ten percent of Bahamian male slaves worked primarily "at sea" on vessels said to be fishing, turtling, droghing, and wrecking. This was the highest percentage of male slaves involved in seafaring in the Caribbean (Higman 1984:68-70; Register of Slave Returns 1834). Given these statistics, there was any number of possible artists for these drawings.

Slave seamen throughout the Caribbean were commonly employed on coastal and inter-island voyages (Bolster 1998:19). Yet the ship graffiti is limited to the Bahamian archipelago, indicating a relationship with some other activity, also more common in the Bahamas than elsewhere in the Caribbean. Wrecking is the only such activity. Exactly how the drawings related to wrecking is unknown but what is certain is their place as part of the Bahamian maritime cultural landscape.

### **Wrecking**

The salvage of wrecked and disabled ships played the dominant role in the Bahamian maritime cultural landscape for almost 300 years. Archaeological evidence of wrecking activity is difficult to determine from a site without corroboration from documents and other material culture sources. Beginning in the mid-17th century with the first English settlers, wrecking was a major source of income for Bahamians until the first third of the 20th century. The Bahamas was in the first group of British colonies authorized to establish a Court of Vice Admiralty in 1697 (Craton & Saunders 1992:102). This court oversaw the validity of prizes seized in war time, and ordered the division of proceeds from cargos salvaged at any time (Vice Admiralty Court Minutes 1832-1858).

By the late 18th century there were indications that Bahamians engaged in two levels of wrecking. On one level were the legal wreck-salvaging operations that were adjudicated by the Vice Admiralty Court. Even in these cases, however, wreckers sometimes declared smaller amounts of salvaged goods in order to be assessed less taxes (Schoepf 1911:282-283). At the second level was the illegal practice of placing lights at dangerous locations to lure ships onto rocks and destruction. This was illegal activity so

documentation, or evidence of it can only be gathered indirectly, such as from personal accounts in diaries and letters, and from indignant newspaper ads trying to shame the culprits into submission. Much of the information collected on this issue, though, was obtained through orally recounted local histories.

The names of at least two areas recalled their earlier wrecking history. Rock Sound, a settlement near the southern end of Eleuthera, is actually a corruption of its original name, Wrack (Wreck) Sound. This name was indicative of the fact that so many of the inhabitants were involved in wrecking (Powles 1888:117). Also, Lantern Head, a wind-swept bluff at the southeastern tip of Abaco, got its name from the practice, as I was told, of placing a light there to lure ships onto the rocks. Rock (Wrack) Sound was only a home base for wreckers, being located on the lee, or protected, side of Eleuthera away from busy shipping routes. On the other hand, Lantern Head's position on the northern edge of a major channel through the archipelago made it vastly suitable as a point of action for any wrecking activity; legal or otherwise.

To curb the actions of Bahamian wreckers, the British Vice Admiralty embarked on a program to construct lighthouses near the most treacherous navigation points through the archipelago. The first two were built in 1836 at Hole-in-the-Wall, Abaco, near Lantern Head and at Gun Cay, on the eastern edge of the Florida Straits. In total, the British Admiralty erected 11 lighthouses in the Bahamas over the course of the 19th century (*Almanack* 1882:95-96). The 20 year gap between the construction of the first three and the gradual planning for the remaining eight suggest that colonial officials in Britain were quite unaware of the full extent of wrecking activity in the Bahamas. The eleventh lighthouse was completed in 1878 atop Dixon Hill on the east coast of Watlings

Island (now San Salvador). It is currently the only one of these lights still in use.

Islanders say ships on their voyage from the Panama Canal to the United States previously could use it to confirm their bearing.

The tenth lighthouse was built in 1876 on Bird Rock near Crooked Island, at the northeastern edge of the Crooked Island Passage. Although the lighthouse is relatively late, other material culture remains on the island, pre-dating the lighthouse, speak to this island's earlier significance relating to shipping lanes through the archipelago. Until the early 19th century this was the major channel used by ships passing through the Bahamas. In the 1790s, newly-settled Loyalist planters pleaded with colonial officials in Nassau to have an armed British vessel patrol this channel as far north as Bird Rock to discourage French privateers from attacking and harassing settlements (Peter Force Collection 1795). A report in *The Bahama Gazette*, 1794, recounted an attempt by two French privateers to capture a local schooner. The island's militia assembled with one cannon and repelled the attackers. These accounts come from documentary evidence.

From the archaeological record, late 18th century plantations provide additional insight. Both plantations, Great Hope and Marine Farm, were at one time fortified by cannon. Those at Marine Farm probably only remained on site because it lies some distance from the only road atop a hill on the interior side of an odorous, old salt pond. These five cannon included four British guns and one French. No specific period of manufacture has been determined for the cannon but, based on excavated material, the military component of this site dates from the early to mid 19th century (Farnsworth & Wilkie 1998:21). Some buildings at both sites also have numerous examples of ship graffiti.

Construction of lighthouses did serve to slow up wrecking activity but only within the immediate vicinity of each lighthouse. The first two, constructed in Bimini and southern Abaco in 1836, put a damper on wrecking in those areas. Residents of Abaco were so incensed by news of the planned lighthouse they threatened to sabotage its construction (Powles 1888:28; *The Bahama Argus* 1836). A third lighthouse was built at Cay Sal near the southeastern edge of the Florida Straits in 1839. Apparently the British Admiralty assumed these few would be sufficient since the next lighthouses were built some 20 years later (*Almanack* 1882:96). In Abaco, however, wrecking was not effectively curbed until a second lighthouse was built on Elbow Cay, one of the outlying northern cays (Powles 1888:36).

Decision-makers within the Admiralty probably also never recognized the role of the Bahamian colonial government in perpetuating the culture of wrecking. The Vice Admiralty Court vigorously prosecuted wreckers to collect the government tax on salvaged goods. For each salvage case fees were also assessed for the services of the entire entourage of court officials, from the judge to the cryer (Vice Admiralty Court Minutes 1832-1858). The colony's annual reports show that auction duty revenue was second only to income from the salt tax. The auction duty was set at two percent on the sale of items auctioned. Although the total amount was much lower by the 1880s, this tax was still one of the largest income-generators for the colony (Bahamas Blue Books 1834-1884). Essentially, wrecking was one of the most lucrative sources of revenue for the Bahamian colonial government. So despite the construction of lighthouses, manned and maintained by the Imperial Lighthouse Service, this implicit local government

support helped encourage and perpetuate the practice of wrecking well into the first half of the 20th century.

### **Other Maritime Activity**

L.D. Powles observed in Bimini that with the decline of wrecking, “the people have been driven to try and get a living by more honest means, such as agriculture, spongeing and turtling.” (1888:28). Spongeing became the Bahamas’ leading industry by the late 19th century and remained so until a fungus devastated the sponge beds in the 1930s (Public Records Office 1974:23). The Bahamian spongeing industry had begun by the early 19th century (Bahamas Blue Book 1834). It had expanded enough a century later to attract a wave of Greek immigrants to the Bahamas (Craton & Saunders 1992:41). Yet in the archaeological record spongeing could be even more difficult to detect than wrecking activity.

All of these seafaring activities relied on the availability of boats. Bahamians necessarily became proficient boat-builders. A Methodist missionary to the West Indies commented, “the inhabitants have endeavoured to build some vessels, in imitation of those that have been launched on the Islands of Bermuda, and which, for their peculiar beauty, swiftness, and durability, have been in almost universal request;...and the vessels they have built are not to be viewed with contempt.” (Coke 1811:199).

Bahamian boat-builders sometimes even exported vessels, mainly to other West Indian islands. According to the Blue Book annual statistical reports for the colony, locally made vessels ranged anywhere in size from 12 to 70 tons; however, local boats averaged about 20 tons burthen (Bahamas Blue Books 1860-1884). Based on written



FIGURE 2. Half model of the *Marie J. Thompson*, a four-masted schooner launched at Harbour Island, 1928. (Bahamas Historical Society Collection)



FIGURE 3. Model of a Bahamian sloop. (Bahamas Historical Society Collection)

descriptions and ethnographic evidence the majority of these boats were sloops and schooners (Figures 2 and 3), although the occasional brigantine was also built. Most of the Bahamian ship graffiti depict sloops and schooners, so it is possible that many of these were locally made vessels. In any event, the graffiti represent the first documented evidence of Bahamian maritime activity as seen in the archaeological record.

Bahamians, through time, have traditionally developed life-ways focused on the ocean and its resources. The topography of the islands allowed few viable options for strong land-based economies. This was the pattern in the pre-Colombian period and became even more pronounced in the centuries since the arrival of European settlers. In the Age of Sail, the Bahamas' location on major sailing routes was a critical factor in the predominance and persistence of wrecking as the principal industry for well over 200 years. The documentation of Bahamian ship graffiti is the first archaeological evidence of this enduring economy of seafaring. Additionally, an examination of this archaeological evidence in conjunction with archival and ethnographic sources indicates the role of people of African heritage, enslaved and otherwise, as the main labor force in this economy.

### CHAPTER III

#### SURVEY OF THE SHIP GRAFFITI – FORMULATING QUESTIONS

##### Examples of Graffiti First Noted

I first noticed ship graffiti on a visit to a plantation site (the *Sandy Point Estate*) on San Salvador Island in about 1983. The two examples noted were about 18 to 24 inches tall and were inscribed on the interior walls of a work/storage building east of the main house. The drawings, however, were not measured or photographed. At the time, their significance was minimized because, in the opinion of another researcher who had spent some time on the island, these drawings were simply modern graffiti. According to him, the boys in his scout troop made similar sketches; to date, this detail has not been investigated. Despite this conclusion, within the next year, someone deemed the two graffiti valuable enough to attempt to steal them. On a later visit to the site the plaster containing one of the drawings had been removed while the plaster encompassing the other drawing was broken in an attempt to remove it so only half of this ship graffiti remained in place. In the years since, a larger area of plaster has fallen off and now the rest of the damaged drawing is gone. There is no record of this graffiti; it now exists only in memory.

More examples of graffiti were discovered at another plantation site on New Providence about two to three years later. A realtor had asked an avocational archaeology group I was a member of to conduct salvage excavations at this site, *Tusculum* plantation, before it was demolished to build a private home. Again, two ship drawings were inscribed on the walls of a building. This time it was the interior wall of a ground floor room in the main house. The drawings were adjacent to a window

overlooking a portion of the island's northwest coast. Since the building was to be demolished, a plan was formulated to save the drawings. One team member, who is an architect, first made plaster casts of the ship images. Next, the plaster encompassing the drawings was removed and backed with plaster of Paris. The original plaster drawings are now part of the collection of the Bahamas Historical Society's Museum in downtown Nassau and the plaster casts are in the collection of the National Museum of The Bahamas. For this research tracings were made of the plaster casts, as these retained the original finish of the plaster before it was removed. The removal process caused substantial cracking in the plaster and although the original drawings are still visible, the extensive cracking in the plaster makes tracing them difficult.

### **Research Possibilities**

The discovery of these drawings revived questions about their meaning and significance. Finding these other examples challenged the assumption that they were merely modern graffiti. Interviews with island residents revealed that *Sandy Point* estate was continuously inhabited from about 1803 until about 1914 (Gerace 1987:15). Archaeological evidence at *Tusculum* plantation, however, revealed that while the grounds around the main house were cultivated until the mid 20th century, there was no indication that the house, its associated structures, and nearby work/storage buildings had been occupied for this same period (Turner 1992:32).

In the next several years a number of other ship drawings were discovered at various sites around the Bahamas. These sites include a cave in southern Abaco; another plantation on San Salvador, *Prospect Hill*; a slave house on New Providence at *Clifton*

plantation; a plantation, *Great Hope* estate, on Crooked Island; a fort on New Providence, Fort Charlotte; a 19th century jail in Nassau, the capital city on New Providence; and a 20th century jailhouse on San Salvador. There seemed to be no particular pattern in where this graffiti could be found on any island. Although the ship graffiti were well represented in the Bahamas, the larger issue was to find where else around the Caribbean or North America similar graffiti are found.

I began asking about ship graffiti from archaeologists and museum professionals who worked in the Caribbean. While examples of ship graffiti are found elsewhere in the region, the highest concentration of them is within the Bahamian archipelago. Ship graffiti are located in an 18th century fort in Puerto Rico; inside a cave near the south coast of the Dominican Republic; also reported from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; from plantation buildings in the Turks & Caicos Islands; and wooden buildings in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. Details of these drawings, such as method of creation and ship construction style, suggest that they were done by different peoples, at different time periods, and probably for different reasons.

All features of the graffiti from the Turks & Caicos Islands are consistent with others found in the Bahamas. Most are inscribed on interior and exterior walls of plantation buildings, the only exceptions being four examples scratched into stones on a hillside overlooking a 19th century dock still in use today. The ship drawings are among a variety of graffiti on stones near the top of this hill and attributed to passengers and crew awaiting the arrival or sailing of their ships. During the Bahamas' plantation period, which lasted from the 1780s to the 1830s, the Turks & Caicos Islands were

administered as part of the Bahamas (Williams 1989:12). For this research, ship graffiti from the Bahamas and the Turks & Caicos Islands are treated as one unit.

### **Historic Period Ship Graffiti Elsewhere in the Americas**

The example of graffiti from the Dominican Republic comes from the Jose Maria cave system of the East National Park in the country's southeast region. Over 1,200 pictographs, drawn with a mixture of clay and charcoal, have been documented within this cave (Foster and Lopez 1996). One mural is believed to represent a Taino depiction of their people being forced to give tribute to the Spaniards. The full mural depicts cassava and guayiga being grown, harvested and baked in a barbeque under the direction of a *cacique* (chief) then loaded onto a Spanish vessel. The mural (Figure 4) ends with this image of a ship, far right (Figure 5).



FIGURE 4. Taino mural depicting forced tribute. (Image by Amanda Evans 2002)



FIGURE 5. Detail of a Spanish vessel within the mural. (Image by Amanda Evans 2002)

In Puerto Rico the ship graffiti are found in the ammunition tunnel of San Cristobal, a Spanish fort built in San Juan between 1631 and 1771. An artillery captain, imprisoned in a room of the main tunnel painted seven ships on the wall (Dooley 1969:47, 51). These ships, painted on one wall, were made using black, red and yellow pigments (Figure 6). This coloration still makes the Spanish flag recognizable on two of the ships. The spritsail and spritsail mast shown on the bow of two ships dates them no later than the early 18th century when these features of ship construction became outmoded.

No images are currently available for the examples of ship graffiti from Rio de Janeiro. It is uncertain whether the buildings they were drawn on still exist. They are reported from the work of a 19th century artist, Johann Moritz Rugendas, who spent 20

years traveling through Latin America. He visited Brazil between 1822 and 1825.

Rugendas, on his travels through the Americas, was known for recording scenes from



FIGURE 6. A spritsail mast on this three-masted Spanish ship suggests a *terminus ante quem* date ca. 1720. (Photograph by Gustavo Garcia [1999]).

the daily life of ordinary people (<[www.contenidos.com/estudios-sociales/viajeros/rugendas.htm](http://www.contenidos.com/estudios-sociales/viajeros/rugendas.htm)>; Theodoro 2002). Robert Farris Thompson, professor of History at Yale University, informed me of this graffiti. He suggested that these were ships drawn by recently arrived Africans in the 19th century thanking God for having survived the traumatic passage across the Atlantic (personal communication 2002).

Without an image reference for this graffiti no assessment can be made.

The ship graffiti from Martha's Vineyard are the only examples located, so far, in North America. These were carved into the timbers of 17th and 18th century houses and are found on interior and exterior walls as well as on floorboards (Figures 7 and 8). They were reported on by Jonathan Scott, a preservation architect (*Sea History* 1997[82]:33),

who had encountered these drawings in some of the buildings he had worked on. Scott compared the drawings to similar, dated illustrations in Howard Chapelle's *History of American Sailing Ships*. The dates from Chapelle were all consistent with the period of the house, except one board which may have been taken from an earlier house (*Sea History* 1997[82]:33).

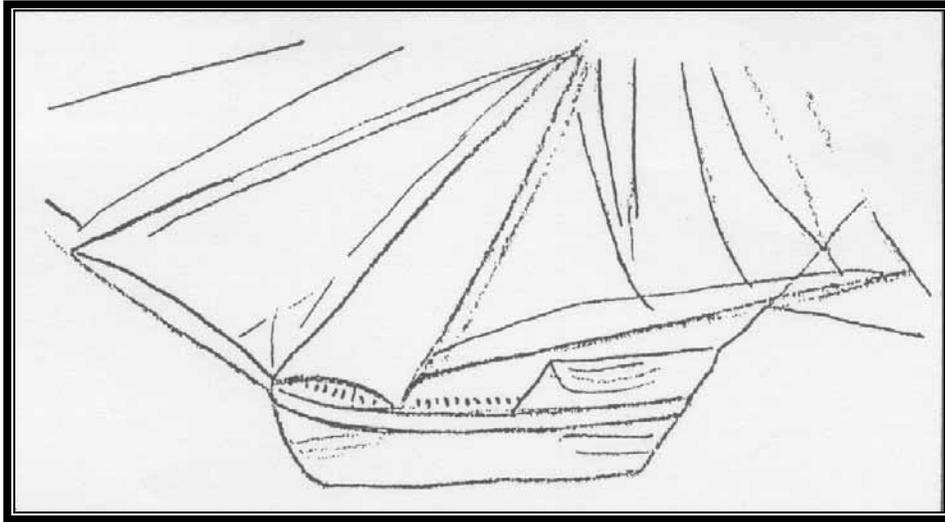


FIGURE 7. Tracing of a late 17th/early 18th century sloop, Red Farm, Martha's Vineyard (Scott 1992).

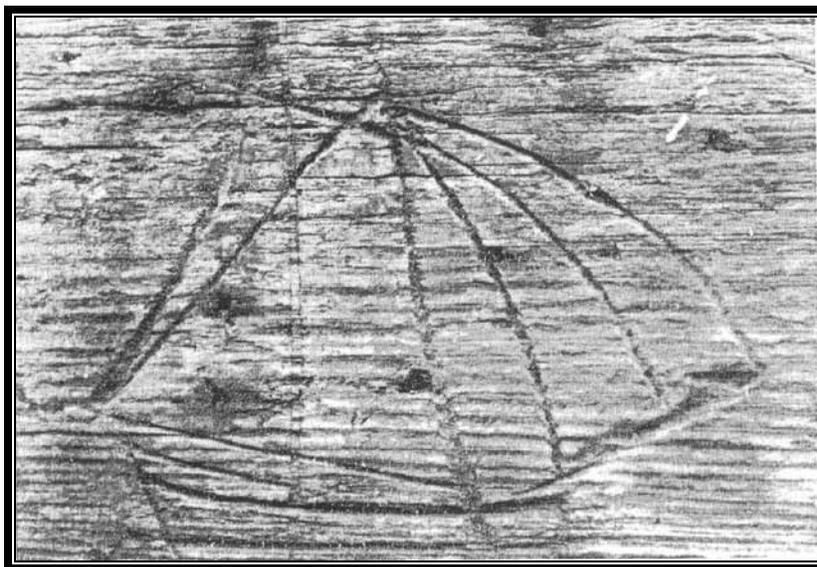


FIGURE 8. Graffito of a contemporary Bermuda sloop, also from Red Farm (Scott 1992).

### **Assessment of the Research Potential**

These references to ship graffiti around the Caribbean region and on the North American coast demonstrate that this is not a phenomenon unique to the Bahamas. In fact, the examples of ship graffiti from medieval European churches and dock areas around ancient Mediterranean towns all seem to support the hypothesis that these drawings are made by different cultural groups, at different time periods, and probably for different reasons. Based on the level of knowledge of ship construction, it is assumed that the artists were either sailors or at least persons with some interest in ships. The location of graffiti, their method of creation, and construction style readily supplement documentary evidence to suggest who may have drawn them and when they did so. Yet without the support of documentary, ethnographic, or other evidence, it is difficult, if not impossible to determine the artists' exact motives for creating these drawings. The best that could be expected is to be able to make informed assumptions about their possible motives.

Another option is to explore the social significance of the occurrence of ship graffiti. As a distinct pattern of cultural behavior creating ship graffiti can give some insight on such related activities as shipping and ship construction. From this point of view, the details of ship technology are just one aspect of broader cultural behavior. Twentieth century examples from Newfoundland (Figure 9) provide more current evidence of the hypothesis that a key significance of ship graffiti is its potential to convey the relative importance of ships and shipping within the society of the graffiti artists. The two major economic activities around the Baie Verte Peninsula today are tourism and fishing (Figure 10).



FIGURE 9. Late 20th century ship graffiti spray-painted onto seaside rock face. (Photo and relative scale courtesy of Sylvia Grider).

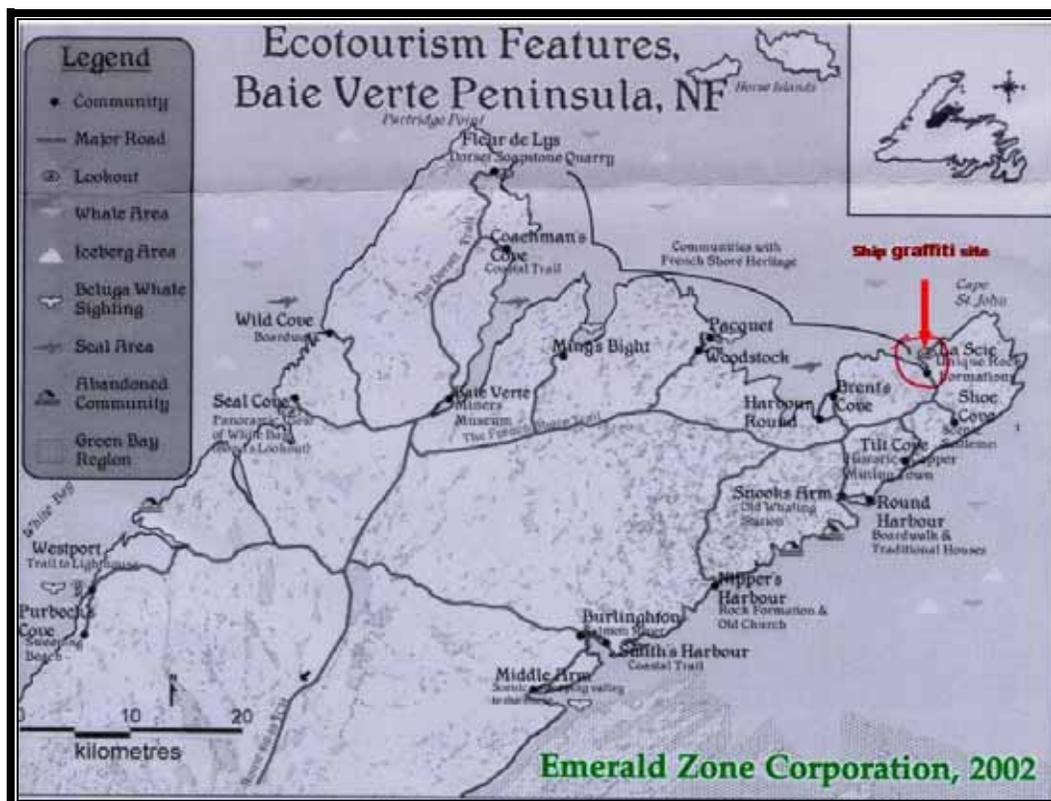


FIGURE 10. Location of ship graffiti site on Baie Verte Peninsula, Newfoundland.

In the Bahamas, location of a number of ship graffiti in areas associated with slaves, or their descendents, suggested that people of primarily African heritage did the majority of these drawings. A first step in the analysis of evidence is to ascertain whether the Bahamian examples of ship graffiti were created exclusively, or only in part, by Blacks. In this thesis, each Bahamian graffiti site will be studied to determine who had most probable access to the areas at the time the drawings were made. Also noted is the level of knowledge about ship construction that the graffiti artists displayed in their work. Both of these are important factors in evaluating the existence of a labor force sufficiently knowledgeable about ships and shipping to have created such an extensive array of ship graffiti.

## **Bahamian Sites Examined**

### **New Providence**

Tusculum - Of the seven plantation sites with documented graffiti, five of the plantation houses contain ship drawings; however, of this five only one, *Tusculum*, had graffiti exclusively on interior walls (on pages 71 and 72). *Tusculum* was owned by Loyalist, William Wylly who also owned *Clifton*. It is known that Wylly migrated to the Bahamas in 1786 and purchased a plantation, believed to be *Tusculum*, on the western end of the island. He lived at *Tusculum* until his house at the larger estate, *Clifton*, was completed about 1809-1810. In 1821 William Wylly moved to St. Vincent where he died in 1827; his property was left to his children. His affairs in the Bahamas were handled by his brother (Turner 1992:32).

Archaeological investigations of the area around the main house indicate that the site was abandoned after the first half of the 19th century but the surrounding hillside was cultivated during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Based on this evidence it is probable that an overseer occupied the main house from about 1810 until it was abandoned several decades later. Only two ship graffiti were discovered in the north eastern corner of the front parlor. It is likely that the graffiti were incised onto the walls during the period an overseer lived in this house.

This is also one of just two main houses in which ship graffiti were documented from interior walls. The assumption here is that planters had no need to create ship graffiti; this particular job was left to the bought and hired help. At *Clifton*, the other Wyly plantation, the only ship graffiti documented is from one of the slave houses. There is a risk of over emphasizing the connection between the creators of Bahamian ship graffiti and Bahamians of African heritage. Apart from ethnicity, another likely factor to be considered in examining the identity of the graffiti artists is their socio-economic status. While slaves and most of their descendents formed the overwhelming majority of lower status Bahamians, there was always a small number of White Bahamians in this category as well. Graffiti sites such as the *Tusculum* main house raise the possibility that socio-economic status, even more than ethnicity, may have been the determining factor in identifying the creators of Bahamian ship graffiti.

In 1985 the *Tusculum* main house (map on page 67) was demolished to make way for a modern house. Prior to the demolition, plaster casts were first made of each graffiti, then the original plaster containing the graffiti was removed so that the graffiti would be preserved. Although the original graffiti are still available they do not

photograph or trace well because of the extensive cracking that occurred when the plaster was peeled off the wall. For this research, the only documentation made of the two ship graffiti from this site were the tracings taken from the plaster casts of the graffiti.

Clifton - Also documented is a sloop inscribed on the window jamb of one of seven slave houses at *Clifton* plantation (on pages 69 and 70). These are the best-preserved examples of slave houses in the Bahamas. The walls were constructed of tabby (unshaped stones set in lime mortar) and stuccoed with lime plaster for a final, smooth surface. On most Bahamian plantations, tabby construction was reserved for the planter's house and economically important storage/work buildings nearby. The main house at *Clifton*, however, is constructed of cut limestone blocks, the most expensive local building material.

*Clifton* plantation encompassed the western tip of New Providence (map on page 67). The slave houses were built in a row along the road leading into the plantation (map on page 68). They are about one quarter mile north of the main house, where the road originally ended. The slave houses are approximately one mile from the coast, and are on flat land, so there probably was never any view of the ocean from these quarters.

Additionally, the sloop was drawn inside a window facing the road, so it is assumed that this vessel was drawn from memory and was also based on the artist's knowledge of ships. Some of the *Clifton* slave houses, including this one, were reoccupied in the early to mid 1900s (Wilkie and Farnsworth 1999:47-48), so it is uncertain whether the artist was a slave or just a descendent of one. In any case, the occupants of this house were all people of African heritage.

The documented graffiti date throughout the 19th and into the early 20th centuries. These examples were preserved primarily because of the type surfaces they were incised on. The examples documented seem to have been created mainly by slaves and their descendents because of such circumstantial evidence as their location in areas frequented specifically by people of African heritage. During the period of slavery, free Blacks probably also participated in creating ship graffiti but these could have been made on other types of building surfaces which have not survived so well. In the Bahamas one construction technique associated, historically and ethnographically, with people of African heritage is the use of wattle and lime plaster. This technique was apparently a Bahamian adaptation of the African-derived wattle and daub construction method using mud to seal the wattle frame of small trees and branches stripped of their bark (Ferguson 1992:63-4). Fragments of wattle-impressed lime plaster are recorded in the excavations of several plantation and historic period sites (Farnsworth and Wilkie 1993:23; Wilkie and Farnsworth 1999:163).

Only small fragments of wattle-impressed plaster survive in the archaeological record and no buildings constructed by this technique still exist. The only buildings that have survived with examples of ship graffiti are those constructed of cut limestone blocks, or, more commonly, of tabby. Examples of graffiti were documented not only on buildings but also from one cave, stones on a hillside, and a slate fragment. If ship graffiti were incised on this known variety of surfaces then it is feasible that examples were also engraved on other types of buildings that have not survived intact in the archaeological record. The examples of ship graffiti documented have survived because of the durability of the surfaces they were incised onto. Being able to record examples

from buildings of other materials would also have helped clarify which specific segment of the population was creating all, or most of this graffiti.

Fort Charlotte - Information available about a number of graffiti sites suggests that most, if not all, of these ships were drawn by people of African heritage. The oldest structure is the Fort Charlotte complex, built between 1787 and 1813 (Public Records Office 1975:17-18). Nassau's largest fort, it was built on the ridge west of the town to guard the harbor's western entrance (map and plan on pages 73 and 74). For much of the 19th century this, and Nassau's other fortifications, were manned by Black troops. Two ship drawings, both war ships, were documented at this site (on pages 74 through 77).

A crudely-drawn war ship is incised on the interior wall of the ravelin, a small platform built in front of main body of the fort. The ravelin was only built in 1813 so this drawing could be no earlier than that date. Inside the fort, immediately east of the bomb shelter, which serves as the fort's entrance, is the second ship graffiti (on pages 74 and 75). This was the largest example recorded (58.5 cms x 54 cms) and includes some helpful details. Two rows of circles designate gun ports, a pennant flies atop the top gallant mast, and a union jack is mounted at the stern. The placement of a later, dated graffiti gave this ship drawing a *terminus ante quem* of 1827.

The segment of Fort Charlotte that this graffiti is on was completed by 1794. For the first few years, the fort was manned by troops from Britain but they died at an alarmingly high rate in the unfamiliar tropical climate. By 1801 a critical decision was made to man Nassau's forts with free Black troops. Despite the vehement protests of Loyalist planters, the first contingent of the West India Regiments arrived in 1803 to take

up their posts. With the exception of officers and artillerymen, Black troops manned Nassau's forts until they were decommissioned in 1891 (Ministry of Tourism 1970:6; Public Records Office 1975:22). Based on this information, it is most likely that both ships at Fort Charlotte were drawn by Black soldiers on duty. Evidently some of these men had either worked on ships, in shipyards, or had a deep interest in them. From the appearance of the drawings it seems that one of these men had greater artistic skill, and/or greater knowledge of ships than did the other.

Nassau Public Library - The building now occupied by the Nassau Public Library was completed in 1799 as the "new gaol" for the colony (map on page 73). It operated as such until 1873 when the jail was relocated and the building became a library and museum (Public Records Office 1975:10). The building is octagonal and stands three stories high with a cellar (plans on page 78). The top floor had no jail cells, only a small, central room surrounded by a verandah. On the first two floors, jail cells radiated around the octagon. This is one of the oldest buildings in Nassau. It is less than 100 meters south of the Parliament buildings (1802) that were originally across the street from the harbor's edge.

Twentieth century sources all presume this room to be either a cellar or dungeon. Instead, it appears that this was not a dungeon but the jail cell reserved for slaves and people of color, even after emancipation. This interpretation is based on the strong association of ship graffiti at other sites with Bahamians of African heritage. The other factor being considered is the socio-economic status of the graffiti artists. In the Bahamas, as elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere, social divisions strongly correlated

ethnicity and socio-economic status; these divisions persisted to the mid-twentieth century.

Documentation of the ship graffiti supported the supposition that the cellar was not simply that but, in fact, served exclusively as the jail cell for Blacks. No other area of the building has any ship graffiti, yet three of the four walls in the cellar are covered mainly with drawings of ships and a few other inscriptions. In view of the stricter racial separation Loyalist immigrants instituted upon their arrival into the colony, it is logical to assume that this separation extended to the treatment of prisoners, especially since even cemeteries were segregated.

Construction and rigging details of the ships suggest that these vessels illustrate developments in ship-building over the first two thirds of the 19th century; for example, one graffiti appears to have a mast and two smoke stacks (on page 87). Given the association of other graffiti sites with Blacks in particular and people of low social status in general, the implication here is that this was the jail cell exclusively for people of color, and lower income presumably until the jail was relocated in the 1870s.

In a 1991 preservation project to repair the building, it was also assumed that this room was a cellar so a wooden reinforcing beam was placed over the top portion of the largest ship graffiti. Neither was any treatment plan deemed necessary for the stuccoed walls. Being partially excavated into the bedrock and with only the small doorway to admit light, the room is constantly dark and damp. The plaster on the lower half of the west and south walls, especially, is dusty and crumbling.

Tracing the details of these graffiti was easier because they were all inscribed into the walls with a very sharp and fine-tipped implement, possibly knives, or broken sherds

of glass. Unfortunately, as the limestone deteriorates these lines act as cuts in the plaster so whole sections of some images have fallen off. Also, attempting to highlight some of the faintly etched drawings, someone traced over a number of the ships in pencil. This only added to the deterioration by crumbling the fragile plaster holding the images. This room is one of the most prolific Bahamian graffiti sites but is also one of the most endangered because the room's original purpose was misinterpreted. Some 20 recognizable ship graffiti were documented in the basement cell at this site (on pages 79 through 101).

The only wall of the room with no graffiti is the wall with the doorway, which is the only source of light into the room. Even this is not coincidental but remained untouched because this wall would have received the least amount of light. In fact, most of the drawings are on the western wall and in the western corner of the south wall which would be those areas getting most of the light from any opening in the doorway.

Although the building is in the heart of downtown Nassau, and just a few hundred meters from the harbor, someone imprisoned in the cellar would not have had a view of the waterfront. This would mean that the drawings were not copied by sight but, instead, were drawn from memory and, it is likely, were also based on the artists' knowledge of ship construction.

### **San Salvador**

Sandy Point - At *Sandy Point*, on San Salvador (map on page 102), (officially called Watlings Island from 1803 to 1926 when the current name was re-instated, (Turner 1997:6), there is one ship drawing on the exterior western wall just above the cellar

doorway. This main house, like *Tusculum*, sits atop a hill overlooking the Atlantic from the island's southeastern coast. Unlike at *Tusculum*, however, it is known that the overseer at this estate for most of the 1820s was one Prince Storr, a trusted black slave of the estate's owner, John Storr, Jr. (Turner 1992:35).

The younger Storr inherited the plantation on the death of his father, who apparently lived there. John Storr lived in Nassau with his wife, Eliza, whose father also owned estates on San Salvador. He apparently preferred to have Prince take on this more mundane task for him. Prince remained as overseer until 1828 when he was charged with the death of another slave who succumbed to his injuries after being severely beaten. He was cleared of the charges but, on the Governor's recommendation, was not immediately sent back to *Sandy Point*. At some point, however, his owner, John Storr, deeded to Prince not only *Sandy Point*, but also two smaller plantations on the same island, *Polly Hill* and *Village Estate*, which his wife had inherited from her father. In his will, dated 1841, Prince deeded parts of all three estates to others who were former slaves at these plantations (Turner 1992:40).

Although this plantation is known to have had a slave overseer it is unlikely that he made any of the ship drawings at this site. The graffito is incised on the exterior wall next to the cellar doorway (on page 103). The cellar was a storage and work area to which slaves had ready access. The other graffiti at this site are also in a slave-accessed work area. It is a work/storage building about 50 meters east of the main house (on pages 105 through 117).

This building has one long, narrow room with at least one window in each wall. Only one doorway provided access into the room from a patio along the front length of

the building. Surrounding the patio is a low wall about 30 – 40 cms high. Based on the oral history of the site, crops were stored in this building. Since the patio was used for drying and processing crops, the low wall served to keep farm animals out (Gerace 1987:16). In this building the graffiti are clustered in and around the northern and eastern window jambs. There is also a good view, from this building, of the Atlantic Ocean on the island's east coast. Sandy Point was continuously occupied until the 1920s; however, all of the graffiti appear to be of early 19th century vessels.

Prospect Hill - At *Prospect Hill*, (map on page 102) the other San Salvador plantation site with examples of ship graffiti, there are several badly eroded drawings on the exterior, eastern wall of the main house along with a number of better-preserved examples on interior and exterior walls of the main house kitchen. The house and associated buildings are located atop a ridge along the island's east coast. In his plantation journal for 1831 to 1832 Charles Farquharson, owner of *Prospect Hill*, records the salvage of one "wrack," and help refloating another vessel by slaves from his plantation (Farquharson 1831-1832:56-57; 69).

As noted at *Sandy Point*, the location of ship graffiti on exterior walls of the main house would have been a reasonable access area for slaves (on pages 128 and 131). The kitchen certainly was a slave work area. This estate had two kitchen buildings but only the one nearest the main house has ship graffiti (on pages 118 through 127), despite the fact that the second kitchen commands a better ocean view than the two buildings with graffiti on them. This detail suggests that only certain slaves possessed the knowledge, and the need, to create these drawings. Also, given the considerable viewing distance to

the ocean, this meant that the artists were not simply copying what they saw. Details of ship construction evident in these drawings (such as the fact that masts are stepped onto the keel) would indicate that the artists had some knowledge of ship construction.

Farquharson, a Loyalist of Scottish heritage, wrote exactly how he spoke, spelling wreck the way he pronounced it, “wrack.” The two distressed vessels mentioned were the wrecked brig, *Enterprise*, which they partially salvaged, and a sloop from Rock Sound, Eleuthera, Bahamas, which ran aground but was repaired and refloated.

According to Eleuthera’s oral history, this settlement’s name was actually Wrack Sound because salvaging wrecks was the main industry of the inhabitants (Farquharson 1831-1832:68). In the distinctive accent of Eleutherians the word “rock” is pronounced “wrack.”

This is the only site where two different recording methods are documented in the forms of a plantation journal and the ship graffiti. It is being assumed that those people who drew the ships were either unable to, or saw no need to, put their experience into words but drew them instead. While it was usual for planters, such as Farquharson, to be literate, it was far less common for people of lower socio-economic status to be so. This was especially so for slaves, even for privileged ones like Prince who had to sign his will with a laboriously-made X (Storr 1844). There is no guarantee that even a white overseer would have been literate.

San Salvador Jail - Ship graffiti were documented at another jailhouse site: Cockburn Town, the administrative center of San Salvador Island. This building was built circa 1910 so these are the only examples of Bahamian ship graffiti which can be definitively

dated to the 20th century. By the end of the 19th century, the local population of San Salvador was exclusively people of predominantly African descent.

The two-storey building was divided into office space on the top floor and two jail cells on the ground floor (photo on page 132). Graffiti is on only one wall of the western cell. Within this cell that wall, the eastern wall, has the clearest view to the harbor. Across the street is the public dock, so inmates could apparently see vessels docked, or approaching the harbor through bars over the doorway. As it is possible these graffiti were recording vessels within the artists' area of sight, it is also being assumed that these examples all depict local ships. Sloops and schooners were the types of vessels traditionally used within the Bahamas.

These graffiti, however, are the most simplistic of all the drawings recorded (on pages 132 through 139). The lines are all fairly straight, suggesting that the artist/s probably used a straight edge in executing the drawings. These ships also do not have the amount of detail found on most of the other examples, such as rigging, and lines denoting fabric panels in sails. Such differences may be attributable to the artist's skill level, and/or knowledge of ship construction. Nevertheless, these examples demonstrate that the tradition of drawing ships, for whatever reason, continued into the 20th century.

### **Turks & Caicos Islands**

Cheshire Hall - At *Cheshire Hall*, on Providenciales, Turks & Caicos Islands (maps on pages 140 and 141), several ship graffiti were inscribed on a lower exterior wall at the rear of the building. A foundation extending beyond these walls suggests that a porch originally covered the walls on which the ships were drawn. The house is also on a hill

overlooking this island's south coast. Although this was a planter's house, the location of the graffiti on exterior walls (on pages 141 through 144), especially at an inconspicuous corner, would be a feasible slave access area.

Wade's Green - Ship graffiti were also documented at *Wade's Green* plantation on North Caicos Island (map and site layout on pages 147 and 148). My guides noted that other examples are at another plantation on Middle Caicos, another island, but dense vegetation made this site inaccessible. The graffiti at *Wade's Green* were in the window jambs on the ground floor of the kitchen (on pages 151 through 154). It is an unusually large kitchen building, divided into two rooms. Based on the height of the walls, it had two floors; or at least a loft. A group of ship graffiti was recorded from the second floor level next to the chimney (on page 149).

Sapodilla Hill - Another "nondescript" graffiti site is Sapodilla Hill on Providenciales Island (island map on page 141). The south face of this hill overlooks South Dock, which is still in use today but dates at least to the early 19th century. A number of large stones on the hill-top are inscribed with a variety of graffiti; the earliest, legibly dated graffiti are from the 1820s. Some record the visits of governors and other notable persons to this site. Among this group of graffiti are four drawings of ships (on page 145). In the case of such an "open-ended" site, it is impossible to determine who, in particular, drew these ships.

## **Crooked Island**

Great Hope - The only other plantation house where ship graffiti were documented is at *Great Hope* estate on Crooked Island (island map and site plan on pages 155 and 157). This house is not on a hilltop but on coastal property instead. The channel along the island's southwestern coast, the Crooked Island Passage, is the deepest channel passing through the southern portion of the archipelago. Historically, this was a major shipping route from the Caribbean Sea, via the Windward Passage between Cuba and Hispaniola, to the north Atlantic.

These ship graffiti are in two sections of the main house but all are on south walls which face the sea. Some drawings are on interior walls of a ground floor room at the south east corner of the house (on pages 163 and 165). A doorway in this room opened onto the front verandah. On the second floor, though, is a larger group of more elaborately drawn graffiti (on pages 158 and 162). These graffiti are all two and three-masted vessels, no sloops, suggesting that these were vessels designed for longer ocean voyages and not just coastal, or island shipping.

The graffiti were all incised on the wall less than one meter above the floor of the second floor verandah. It appears that whoever drew these ships either sat, squatted, or knelt to do so. Even though the drawings are on interior and exterior walls of the planter's house, it could be assumed that both areas were slave-access areas. The ground floor room is in a back corner of the house, but the second floor verandah was probably a private area reserved for the planter's family and their guests. This invitation, though, could have been extended to special slaves, so privileged because of their knowledge and

skill. Neither area of the house was a prominent spot to be reserved exclusively for the white planter's family.

During the 1995 excavations on Crooked Island, I remember a small work building that had so many ship graffiti on its west wall that a number of the drawings overlapped. One vessel clearly sported a union jack on its topmast. This was interpreted as a laundry building on *Marine Farm* plantation (site plan on page 156). Unfortunately, during the fieldwork, July 2002, for this research I was unable to access this site so these graffiti examples are not included in this thesis.

By 1820, *Great Hope* plantation belonged to Henry Moss. He had inherited all the property of his two uncles, William and James Moss and became the wealthiest and largest slave owner in the Bahamas (Turner 1997:10). In 1821, none of his slaves were registered as having any maritime skills. Yet according to the 1834 slave returns, Moss, and many other planters, purchased a number of male slaves with maritime and/or ship-building skills (Register of Slave Returns 1834). This was shortly before slavery was abolished, throughout the British Empire, by the Emancipation Act as of 1 August 1834.

West Indian planters were, by this time, aware of this forthcoming landmark legislation so why would a Bahamian planter be investing in new slaves so close to this point? Even though slavery would legally end in August 1834, as a compromise to the planters, the Act provided for a gradual emancipation through an apprenticeship period. For *praedial*, or field slaves, this apprenticeship phase was to last six years and *non-praedial*, or household slaves, were to be totally free after four years' apprenticeship. Full emancipation, however, came for all slaves in 1838 (Department of Archives 1984:44).

Bahamian planters who were buying slaves shortly before emancipation were trying to minimize their losses by taking on slaves with skills that would be economically useful. This way, these planters had more opportunity to profit from the free labor of their slave work force before the terms for free labor was abolished forever. So at this site it is likely that former slaves drew some of the ship graffiti. In fact the construction style of the ships on the second floor could very well date to the mid-1800s, well after emancipation in the Bahamas.

### **The Abacos**

Abaco is the most northerly island in the Bahamian archipelago (map on page 166). It lies between the Florida Straits to the north and the Northeast Bahama Channel to the south. Historically, both waterways were important shipping routes between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Plantations never played a major role in Abaco's economy; seafaring was always the main source of livelihood. Abaco's economy focused on the ocean and related trades, such as boat building. In the Bahamas, the major ocean-related activity was salvaging shipwrecks, and the people of Abaco were some of the leading wreckers. Of the 11 lighthouses the British Admiralty built in the 19th century around the Bahamas to discourage illicit wrecking of ships, two are on Abaco Island: one in the north and the other in the south (Langton-Jones 1949: frontpiece). The cave and southern lighthouse share the name of the area, Hole-in-the-Wall, referring to a narrow, difficult sailing passage nearby.

Hole-in-the-Wall Cave - Ship graffiti inside an Abaco cave is consistent with the historical activity of gathering bat *guano* from caves to use as fertilizer (Governor Dowdeswell 1800: CO23/39/167-210). Abaco never had a strong agricultural economy, but bat *guano* was one of a number of products “harvested” from the environment and sold (Bahamas Blue Book 1834). Most of the ship graffiti at this site are carved into a boulder. Above the ships are the numbers, 1450, which might have been intended as a date. The construction style of most of the ships, however, is more consistent with those of the late 18th and early 19th centuries rather than the 15th century (on pages 171 through 174). In the case of these drawings their location gives no further clues as to who drew them.

Elsewhere in the cave is another ship graffito. This example, however, was not incised but painted onto the stone surface in a *guano* paste (on page 176). It is unique among the collection of Bahamian ship graffiti documented. Since the view of the ship illustrated is also from a different angle than all the other examples it is supposed that the artist who created this graffito belonged to a cultural group who inhabited the Bahamas at a different time from those artists who created the other type of Bahamian ship graffiti. The *guano* ship graffito most closely resembles the ship image from a Taino mural, also in a cave, but in the Dominican Republic (Figure 5, page 39). This Bahamian *guano* ship graffito is therefore interpreted as Lucayan material culture dating at least 300 years earlier than other ship graffiti from the archipelago. The vessel recorded is illustrated from a totally different perspective because the interest and purpose of the artist, in recording this ship, is assumed to have been different from those of ship graffiti artists in the historic period.

New Plymouth Gaol - Ship graffiti recorded from other Abaco sites include the graffiti of a sloop etched into both sides of a small slate fragment (on page 169). This example was excavated from a plantation-era site in the settlement of New Plymouth on Green Turtle Cay (map on page 167) off the north coast of Great Abaco island. A stylus, also made of slate, was found in association with the slate fragment (Lance and Carr 2003). At this site, an early 20th century government administration building was built on part of the foundation for the main house. The slate fragment containing the graffiti came from rubble around the older foundation (site plan on page 168). Although the graffiti is likely affiliated with the plantation buildings, no further association can be made without a more detailed archaeological context.

I also learned of more examples of ship graffiti at two plantation sites in the Abacos. One is on Little Abaco, at the northern end of this island group and the other is a former plantation called *Alexandria* near the southern end of Abaco Island. As both of these are undisturbed plantation sites they would be critical test cases in examining the archaeological context to understand if the profile which predominates on other islands also holds true for Abaco (Carr, personal communication 2004; Pateman, personal communication 2004).

### **Research Implications**

It is evident from archival sources, such as the Register of Slave Returns, that slaves were regularly employed not only to on board ships, but in shipyards as well. This information is important in establishing whether Bahamian slaves and free Blacks had the knowledge base to have created ship graffiti such as those documented for this research.

The analysis of details in ship rigging and ship construction is intended to ascertain what level of knowledge, if any, Bahamian ship graffiti artists possessed.

If Bahamian ship graffiti were created predominantly by Blacks, then it is likely they also inscribed ships on the types of buildings used exclusively by them. Until the arrival of Loyalists in the late 18th century, buildings in the Bahamas were more commonly constructed of wood, or were made of wattle covered over with lime plaster. So it is quite possible the practice of ship drawing dated much earlier than the 19th century. Only through the haphazard nature of the preservation process could so many examples be documented from such a variety of sites. By using these remaining examples as a starting point for investigating questions about the cultural identity of the artists, it may be possible to trace the development of this practice more fully.

A part of this research effort would be an examination of any economic activity related to shipping in the Bahamas from the 17th century onward. Foremost among these activities was wrecking which entailed the salvage of cargo and materials from wrecked vessels as well as the rescue and assistance offered, for a fee, to passengers and crew of stranded and distressed ships. There were both legal and illegal components to this local industry.

In the 19th century the British Admiralty ordered the construction of 11 lighthouses throughout the archipelago to ensure safer routes for ships sailing through, or near, the Bahamas. Even with so many lighthouses, there was ample opportunity for the practice of wrecking to continue well into the 20th century. The latest incident I could document was recounted to me by Mrs. Keva Hanna-Lawrence (2002) who remembered the salvage of a wreck sometime in the 1940s. Her father was the lighthouse keeper

stationed, with his family, at the Bird Rock lighthouse off the west coast of Crooked Island in the central Bahamas. She recalls that island residents salvaged the cargo and for a long time afterwards there was a ready supply of South American corned beef!

## CHAPTER IV

### CATALOGUE OF BAHAMIAN SHIP GRAFFITI

#### **Methodology**

Examples of ship graffiti were recorded from 13 sites on seven islands and cays in the archipelago. Direct documentation was done at 10 of these sites, with graffiti from the other three being recorded solely from photographs. Information is included on ship graffiti from three other sites that were not documented in this research. This catalogue is therefore not an exhaustive listing of Bahamian ship graffiti. Rather, it is intended to illustrate a particular cultural behavior through time and space.

The graffiti were photographed using both 35 mm and digital cameras. Most sites are in dense vegetation. It was not always possible to have good lighting and a reasonable position for photographing graffiti details. These factors, plus the process of erosion on the graffiti meant that fine details could not be recorded by photography alone. Waxed paper tracings were made of a selection of graffiti from each site. Computer-generated tracings were created from the photographs for all others. No clear photographs were available for some graffiti so these examples are represented in the catalogue only by a tracing. All photographs and tracings include a metric scale. The scale used in photographs is blocked off in units of two centimeters, while the scale used for tracings is shown in units of one centimeter.

To facilitate identification the graffiti were categorized by vessel type. Each one was assigned a consecutive letter within these groups. The images are catalogued by site and by island along with brief discussions on details indicating the artists' knowledge of sailing ships. To enhance the details of the graffiti, documentation for each image

includes a photograph as well as a tracing from the original graffiti, or a computer-generated tracing made from a photograph.

The general locations of all the graffiti sites are shown on maps of each island. Site locations for New Providence are shown in Figure 11. Maps and site plans were available for some sites. These were included to give some perspective on the relevance of any graffiti at these locations. Permission was obtained to use archaeological site maps for four sites. Site plans for two others were available in publications. Unfortunately no site plans are currently available for the remaining seven sites. For these sites, only the general island map was used. The chart in Table 1 gives an overview of the types of ship graffiti found at each site.

TABLE 1  
Chart showing types of ship graffiti documented at each site.

|                               | Ketch | Sail       | Lucayan | Hull | Sloop               | Schooner               | Brigan-<br>tine | Barque | Shallop | War-<br>ship | Steamer &<br>Un-named | Erased          | Group  |
|-------------------------------|-------|------------|---------|------|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------|--------|---------|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------|
| New Prov.                     |       |            |         |      |                     |                        |                 |        |         |              |                       |                 |        |
| Clifton                       |       |            |         |      | A                   |                        |                 |        |         |              |                       |                 |        |
| Tusculum                      |       |            |         | Z    |                     | A                      |                 |        |         |              |                       |                 |        |
| Ft. Charlotte                 |       |            |         |      |                     |                        |                 |        |         |              |                       |                 |        |
| Nassau Pub.<br>Library        |       |            |         |      | B, C,<br>D          | B, C, D, E,<br>F, G, H | A, B            |        | A       | A, B         | Fig.27,<br>X, Y,      |                 |        |
| San Sal.                      |       |            |         |      |                     |                        |                 |        |         |              |                       |                 |        |
| Sandy Point                   |       |            |         |      | E, F                | I, J, K, L,<br>M, N    |                 |        |         |              |                       | Figs. 44,<br>45 |        |
| Prospect<br>Hill              |       |            |         |      | G, H,<br>I          | O, P, Q, R,<br>S       |                 |        |         |              |                       |                 | Fig.50 |
| San<br>Salvador<br>Jail       |       |            |         |      | J, K,<br>L, M,<br>N | T                      |                 |        |         |              |                       |                 |        |
| Providencs.                   |       |            |         |      |                     |                        |                 |        |         |              |                       |                 |        |
| Cheshire<br>Hall              |       |            |         |      | O                   | U                      |                 |        |         |              |                       |                 |        |
| Sapodilla<br>Hill             |       |            |         |      |                     | V, W                   |                 |        |         |              |                       |                 |        |
| N. Caicos                     |       |            |         |      |                     |                        |                 |        |         |              |                       |                 |        |
| Wade's<br>Green               |       |            |         |      | P, Q,<br>R          | X, Y, Z                |                 |        |         |              |                       |                 | Fig.67 |
| Crooked Is.                   |       |            |         |      |                     |                        |                 |        |         |              |                       |                 |        |
| Great Hope                    |       | Fig.<br>77 |         |      | S, T,<br>U, V       | AA, BB,<br>CC, DD      |                 | A      |         |              |                       |                 | Fig.74 |
| The Abacos<br>New<br>Plymouth |       |            |         |      | W                   |                        |                 |        |         |              |                       |                 |        |
| Hole-in-the-<br>Wall          | A     |            | Fig.85  |      | X                   | EE                     |                 |        |         |              |                       |                 |        |

## New Providence

### Clifton

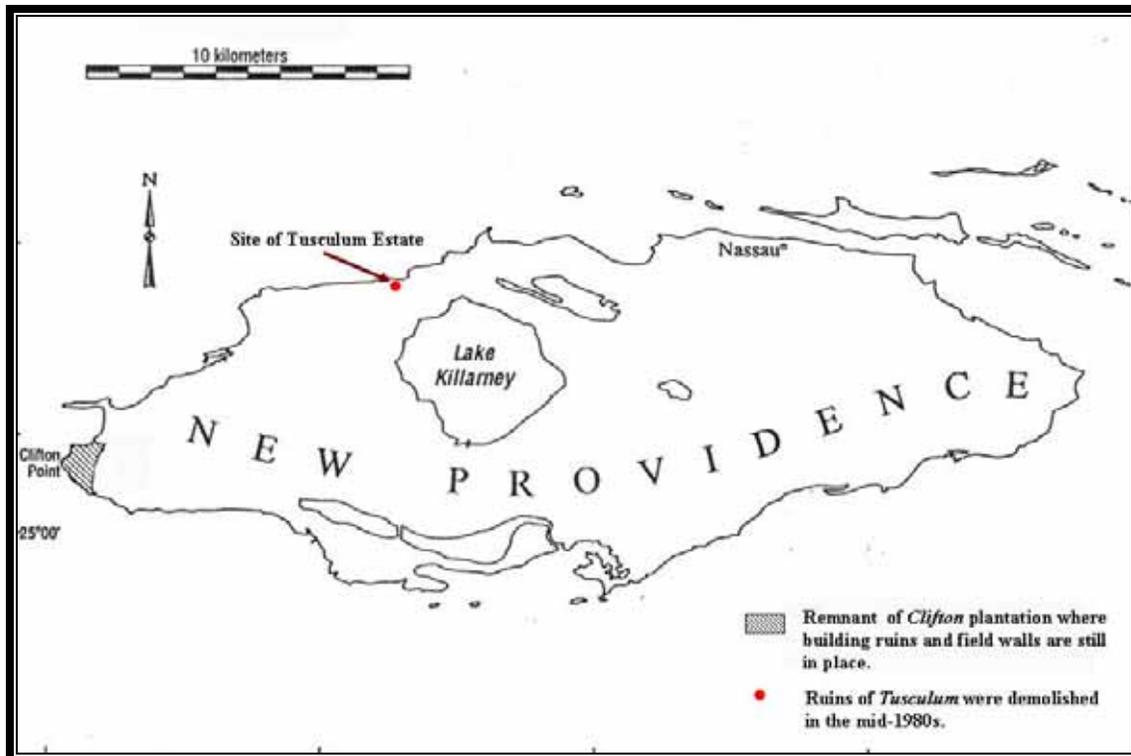


FIGURE 11. Map of New Providence Island showing the locations of *Clifton* and *Tusculum* plantations and Nassau, the capital city. (Adapted from Wilkie and Farnsworth 1999:2).

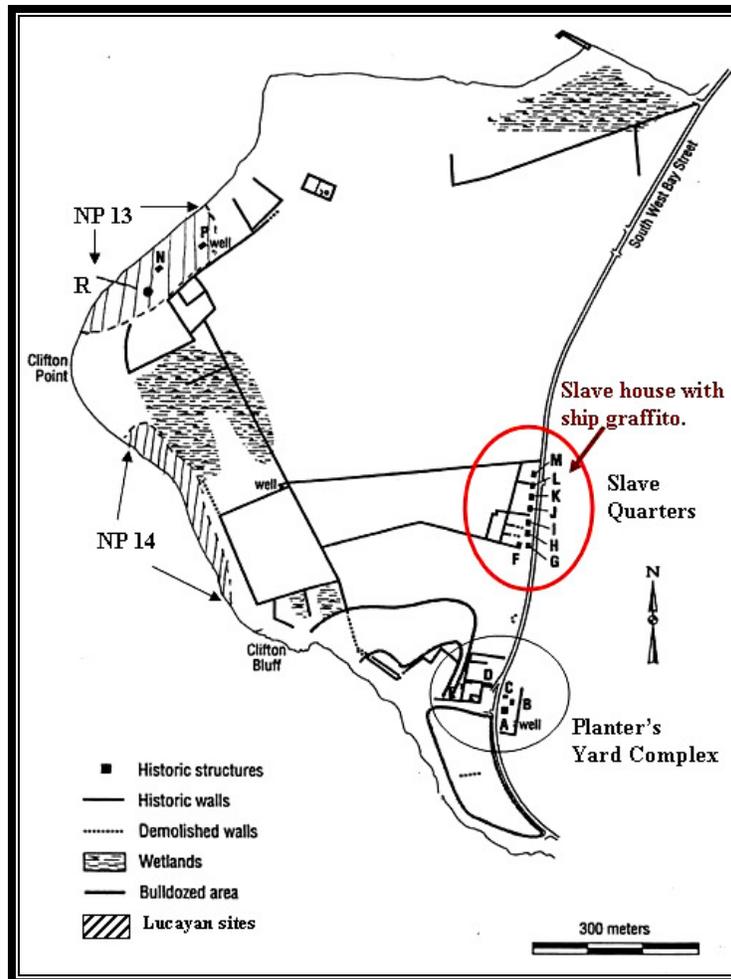


FIGURE 12. Site map showing the components of *Clifton* plantation. The slave house with the ship graffiti is here designated as building L. (Adapted from Wilkie and Farnsworth 1997:4).

Only a single ship graffiti was recorded for *Clifton* plantation. This example is from the Slave Quarters which are some distance from the coast (Figure 12) and would not have even had a view of the ocean. Additionally, the ship graffiti is incised on the jamb of a window (Figure 13) facing the plantation's main road and not the ocean. The overall implication of this information is that this graffiti artist was of African heritage and could apparently replicate the details of a sloop from memory.

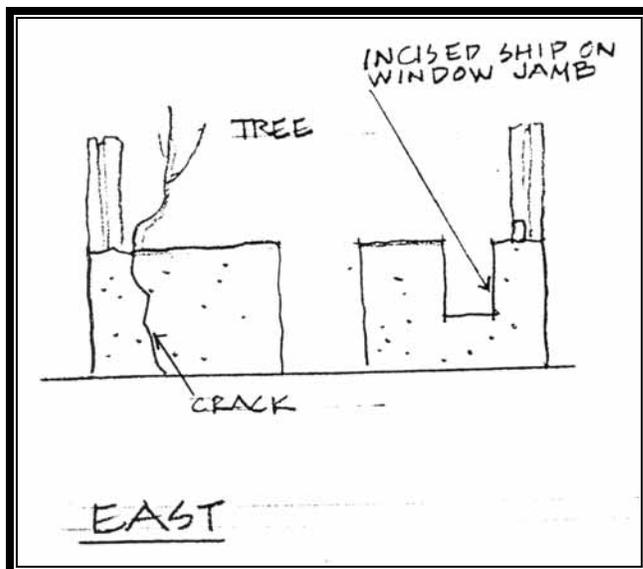


FIGURE 13. Eastern elevation of slave house L indicating the location of the graffito. (Hersh 1993).



FIGURE 14a. Photograph of Sloop A graffito on the window jamb of a slave house at *Clifton*.

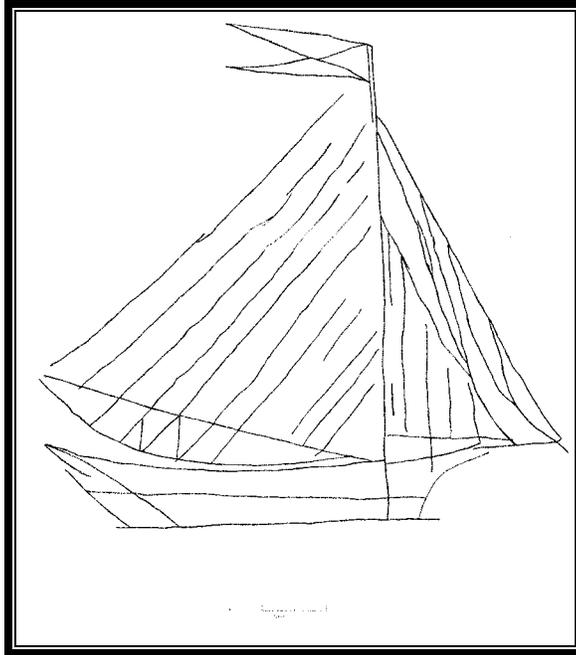


FIGURE 14b. Tracing of Sloop A graffito, *Clifton* plantation.

The following observations were made about the knowledge of ship construction evident on the Sloop A graffito (Figures 14a and 14b):

- The line representing the keel seems to have been drawn first as it extends beyond the bow and stern lines of the hull. This line and the curved one representing the bow are the heaviest lines on the drawing.
- The horizontal line along the center of the hull could represent the load, or water line.
- The line representing the mast extends through the hull, ending atop the keel.
- Diagonal lines on the sails which extend from left to right appear to represent elements of the vessel's rigging.
- In contrast, diagonal lines extending right to left and vertical lines on the sails seem to represent the panels of fabric making up the sail.
- The deep curve at the bow and the number of sweeping curves and very straight lines suggest that the artist used aids to record the lines of this vessel.

## New Providence

### Tusculum

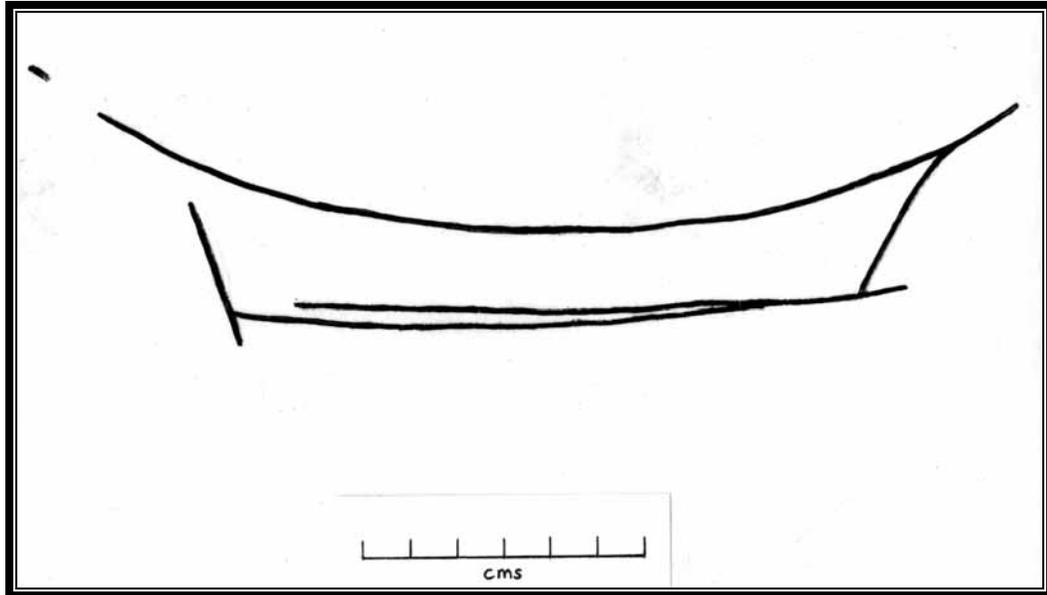


FIGURE 15. Tracing of the hull of a vessel, Graffito Z, *Tusculum* main house.

It is uncertain whether Graffito Z (Figure 15) was a work in progress or if it was intended to only depict the hull of some undetermined vessel type.

- The plaster around this graffito was in very good condition so this is not the remains of an eroded graffito. Some other sites where graffiti was documented have graffiti examples of just hulls but usually these are on walls where the plaster is heavily eroded, or they are among a jumbled cluster of overlapping ship graffiti.
- This example was included not simply because it is so clear but because it may indicate that at least some examples of ship graffiti were drawn in stages and not all at once.

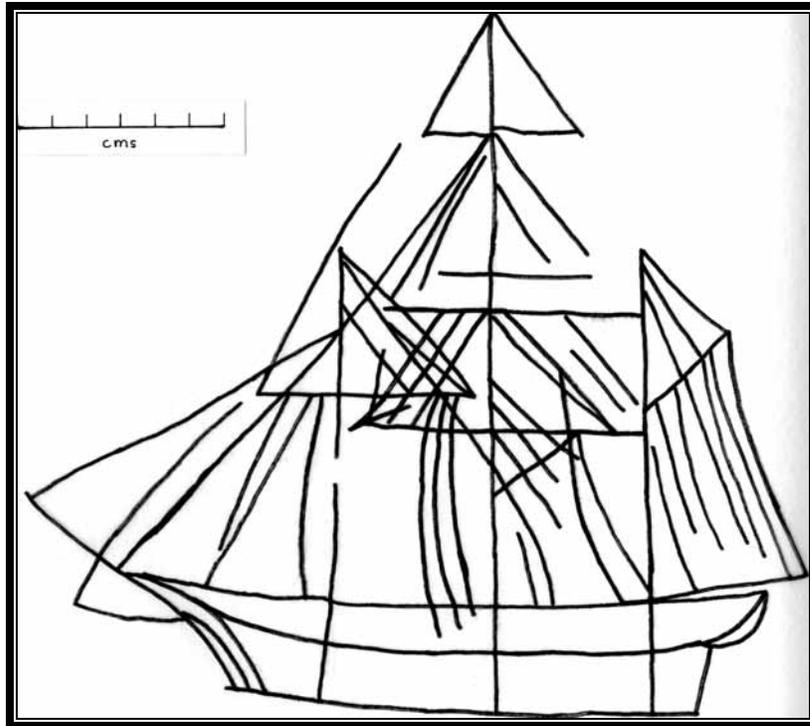


FIGURE 16. Tracing of Schooner A graffito from *Tusculum* main house.

- This is a three-masted schooner as evidenced by the three lines representing the masts continuing to the base of the hull which represents the keel (Figure 16).
- All three masts have fore and aft sails with gaff top sails but it appears that the main mast is also rigged with double top sails and a top gallant sail. Even though the triangular shapes of these apparent sails suggest they are gaff sails, the usual rigging practice for both schooners and brigantines was to put layered, square top sails on the fore mast only.
- Flying jib and standing jib sails are rigged on the jib boom.
- The horizontal line on the hull appears to outline the fine run of the vessel. This line may also represent the ship's load, or water line.
- Two curved, vertical lines at the bow also convey the impression of the narrowing hull lines closer to the keel.

## New Providence

### Fort Charlotte

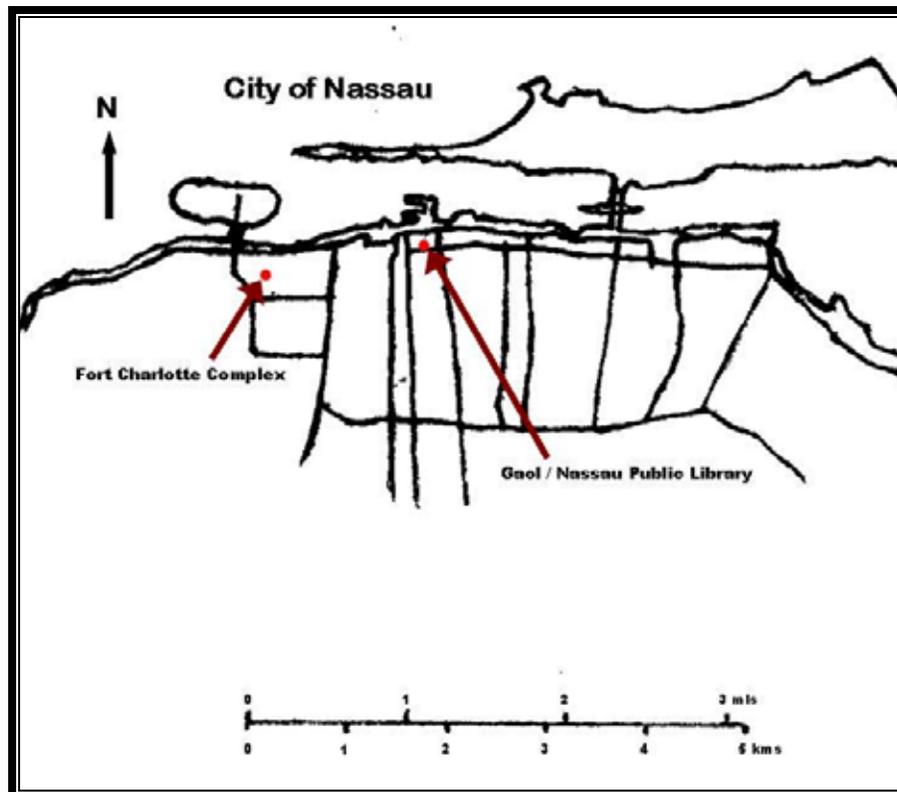


FIGURE 17. Map of the city of Nassau showing the locations of two ship graffiti sites.

Fort Charlotte (Figure 17) is the largest of three forts built to protect the town of Nassau. The fort sits atop a hill at the western edge of the town to be able to protect the main entrance to Nassau's harbor. A swamp south of the military complex was a breeding ground for disease-carrying mosquitoes. Less than five years after its completion the difficult decision was made to staff Nassau's forts with free Black troops. With its commanding view of the entrance to the harbor the soldiers on duty had an excellent view, and ample opportunity to create ship graffiti. The only ship graffiti at this site are warships (Figure 18) and were possibly some soldier's attempt to record the visit of British warships.

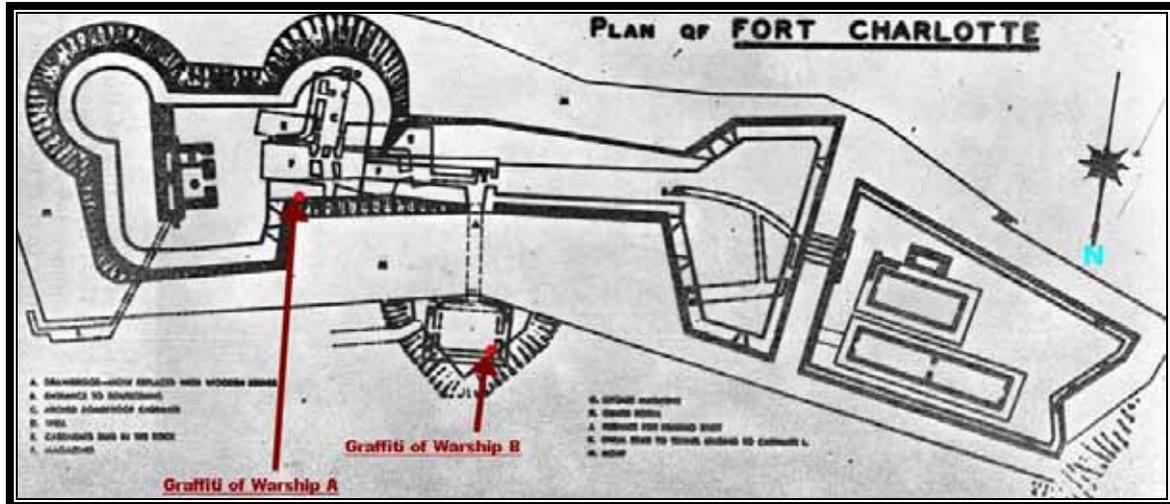


FIGURE 18. Plan of Fort Charlotte showing the locations of two ship graffiti. (Ministry of Tourism 1970:8)



FIGURE 19a. Photograph of Warship A graffiti inside Fort Charlotte.

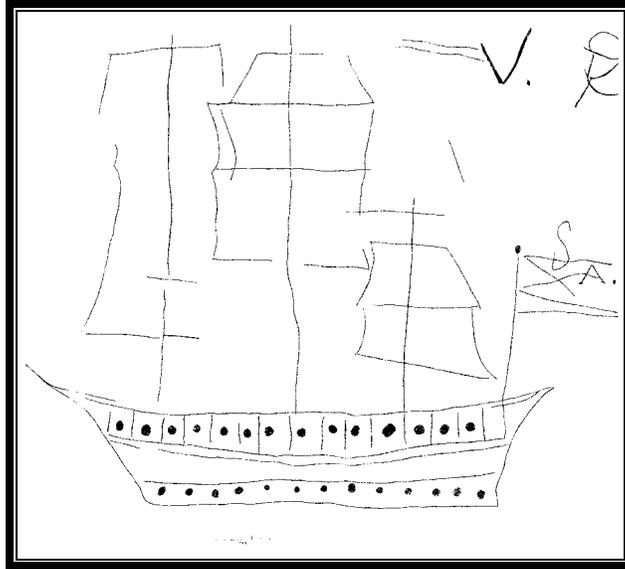


FIGURE 19b. Tracing of Warship A graffito to enhance details.

This graffito (Figures 19a and 19b) was interpreted as a British warship based on:

- The two rows of circular grooves give the idea of gun ports.
- The flag flying astern has two crossed, diagonal lines. Two white diagonal lines crossed on a blue background formed the flag of St. Andrew which was used as a British sea flag (Wilson 1986:65).
- The double horizontal lines below the upper gun deck probably represent a wale reinforcing the weight and recoil of the cannon above.

General details noticeable are:

- All masts are rigged with a sail, top sail and top gallant. The sail outlines on the main mast and two unconnected lines atop the mizzen mast, suggest the artist may have also included top gallant royal sails.
- In the photograph, some standing rigging is visible at the base of the mizzen mast.
- A segment of a pennant, flying from the main mast, is discernable.

A later graffito for A. Bartlett gives this ship graffito a *terminus ante quem* of 1827.

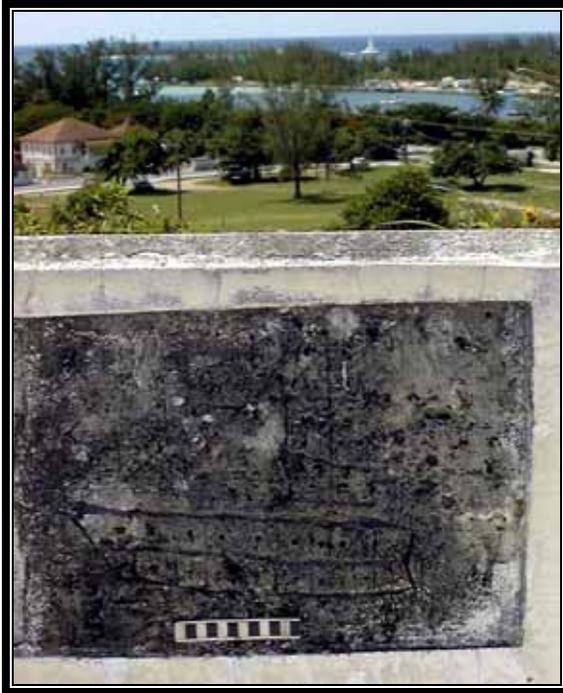


FIGURE 20a. Photo of Warship B on west wall of ravelin to Fort Charlotte.

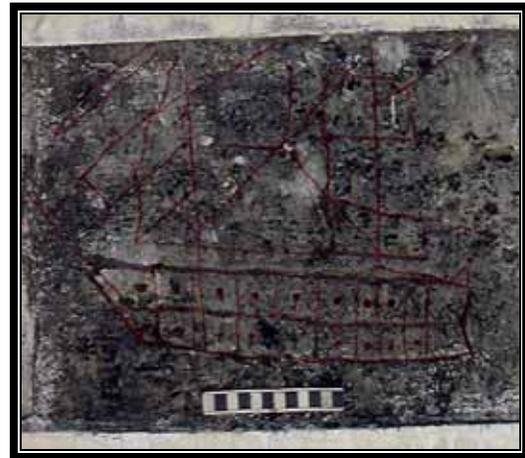


FIGURE 20b. Computer-generated tracing of Warship B graffiti.

Compared to Warship A this example (Figures 20a and 20b) was very crudely executed. Interpreting the details of the image was also not helped by such factors as the weathering of the limestone surface as well as the after effects of an earlier preservation effort. Despite these drawbacks, though, a number of important features can be noted from the image:

- This vessel only has two masts; the mainmast is aft and closer to the stern and the foremast is forward, near the bow.
- Surviving details of this graffiti show only the line representing the foremast continuing through the hull of the vessel to the base, representing the keel. Such details would only be known to those familiar with ships through living and working on them, or building them.

- The mainmast appears to be rigged with a main sail, main top sail, and main top-gallant sail along with a gaff sail.
- Only the left outline of the fore sails is visible but the three successively smaller scallops suggest the artist intended to show a fore sail, fore top sail, and fore top-gallant sail.
- Diagonal lines leading from the two masts and leading to the bow seem to indicate stays for the masts and sails.
- Two diagonal lines in the space where the fore sail would be could denote braces.
- As with Warship A, the two rows of small circles along the hull suggests gun ports.

Based on the above information, Warship B was interpreted as an armed brig. The Royal Navy was known to use this type of vessel until the early nineteenth century (Biddlecombe 1925: Plate XV, 109; Dudzus & Henriot 1986:59; Kemp 1980:202).

## New Providence

### Nassau Public Library/ Gaol

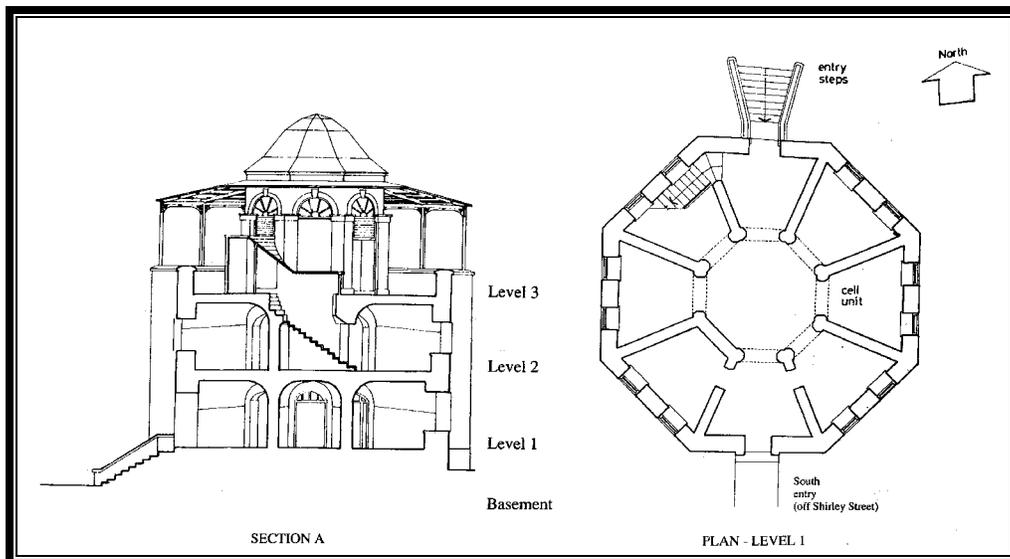


FIGURE 21. This building was the town's jail from 1799 to 1873. Ever since, it has housed the city's library and first museum collection (Public Records Office 1975:10). (Illustration from Douglas 1992:26).

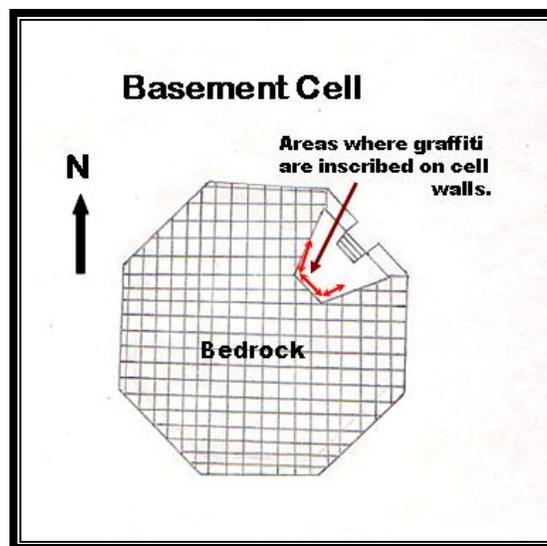


FIGURE 22. The basement cell is the only room in the building with any historic graffiti.

This basement jail cell (Figures 21 and 22) is the most prolific ship graffiti site documented for this research.

## West Wall of Gaol Cell



FIGURE 23a. Sloop B rigged with a fore and aft main and fore sails.

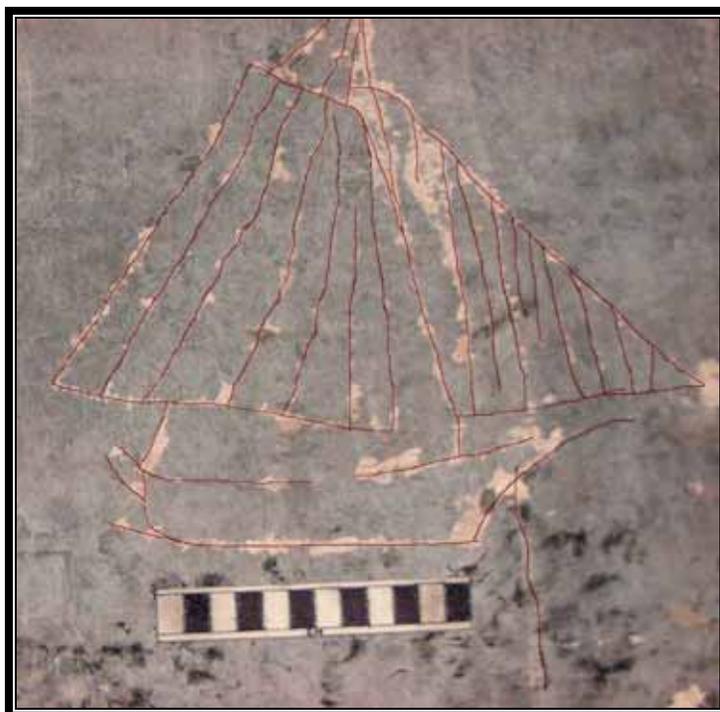


FIGURE 23b. Sloop B's outline enhanced electronically.

- This graffito (Figures 23a and 23b) shows a sloop rigged with a fore and aft main sail and a fore sail.
- Lines above the main sail seem to represent a gaff top sail. If these lines do indicate a top sail then this, and similar graffiti, serve as illustrations of local, or Caribbean, rigging traditions. According to Biddlecombe, the rigging of sloops and smacks was similar cutters but was “much lighter.” Although he noted that cutters could be rigged with a gaff top sail, and a half top sail on the top mast, the upper rigging he lists for sloops and smacks only include square top sail and top gallant sails on some sloops (1925:110). Other sources most commonly show only yachts and clipper schooners with fore and aft top sails (Phillips-Birt 1962:*figure 88*; MacGregor 1997:56-57; Gardiner 1993:14-15). From this information it is presumed that local and Caribbean sloops sometimes had gaff top sails added to enhance their speed and maneuverability in sailing between islands. Alternately, these lines could also represent peak halyards used for raising the gaff.
- A line extending from the bow may represent an anchor rope.
- The line running between the foot of the main sail and the stern probably represents a mast stay.
- The rounded section on the stern appears to indicate a transomed stern.

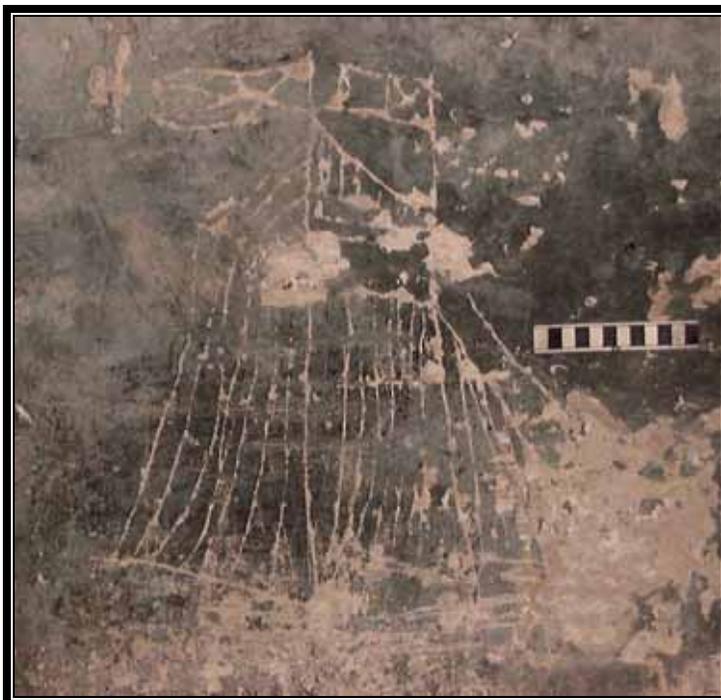


FIGURE 24a. Eroded graffito on lower west wall depicting Schooner B.



FIGURE 24b. Traced outline of Schooner B.

Despite the plastered surface being heavily degraded where the jib boom and hull of this vessel was originally drawn, about two thirds of it is sufficiently visible to make some determinations about the rigging plan (Figures 24a and 24b).

- Both masts are rigged with fore and aft sails. On British, schooner-rigged vessels the fore mast could have square top sails while the main mast and mizzen sometimes carried gaff, or fore and aft, top sails. American schooners were rarely ever rigged with any square sails (Bennet 2001:10; Biddlecombe 1925:109; Gardiner 1993:14-15; MacGregor 1997:34; Phillips-Birt 1962:162-163).
- The fore mast also has a fore sail, and atop the main sail are a gaff top sail and main top stay sail.
- The diagonal line leading to the jib boom could represent the fore top mast stay.
- Flying above the main top mast is a union jack and on the flag on the fore top mast probably represents a company flag. Merchant ships were allowed to fly the red ensign (the union jack in the top, left quadrant on a red field) since 1647; usually it was flown from the bow. By the early 19th century companies began using private, house flags to distinguish their vessels. House flags were most often flown from the main mast but were sometimes flown from the fore mast, as seen on this graffito (Wilson 1986:34-39).

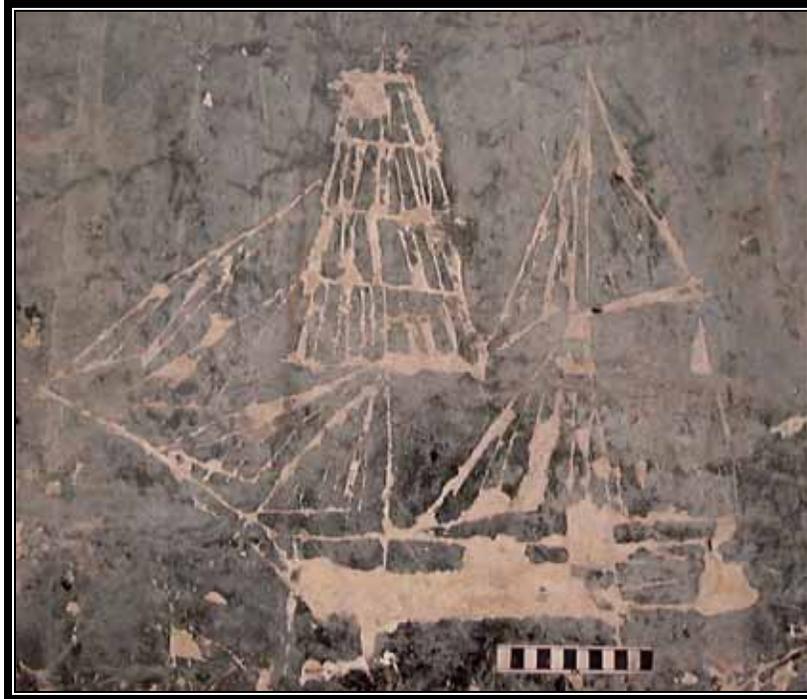


FIGURE 25a. Brigantine A on upper portion of west wall.

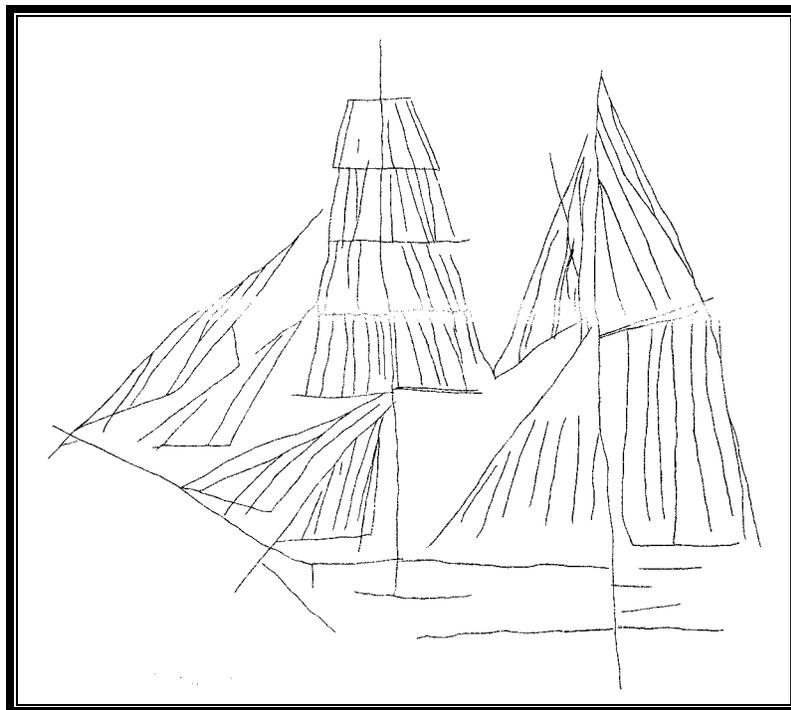


FIGURE 25b. Tracing of Brigantine A, upper west wall of the cell.

Brigantine A graffito depicts a two- masted vessel (Figures 25a and 25b). The brigantine rig, as defined by Biddlecombe (1925:109), combined the rig of a brig on the fore mast and the rig of a schooner on the main mast. This meant that the fore mast is rigged with square sails but only fore and aft sails are on the main mast (Gardiner 1993:13).

- The fore mast is rigged with the square fore sail, double top sails, and single top-gallant sail. The fore sails may have been reduced in relative size in order to clearly show all the jib sails.
- Its head sails on the jibboom include first a flying jib, standing jib, inner jib, and fore stay sail.
- On the main mast are a fore and aft main sail, and main stay sail; above these are a gaff top sail and main top stay sail.
- The line representing the main mast continues even past the hull outline, indicating it was stepped on the keel. The fore mast, however, is shown to end at a level above the keel. Local unfamiliarity with the construction details of this larger, ocean-going ship may account for this discrepancy.

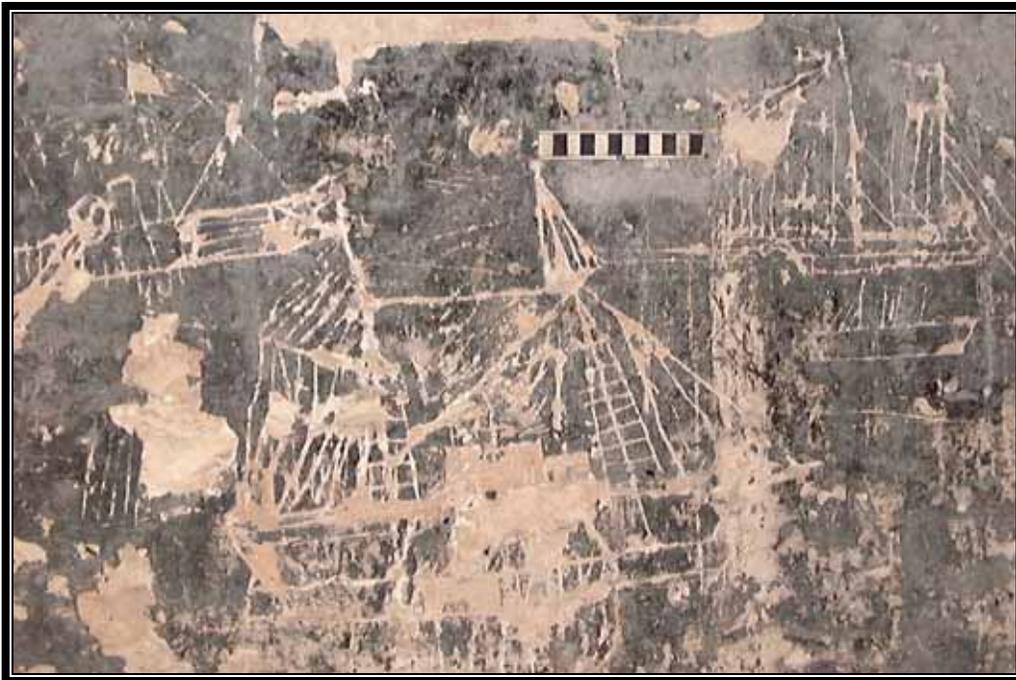


FIGURE 26a. Schooner C, also on the west wall, includes mast shrouds for the two masts.

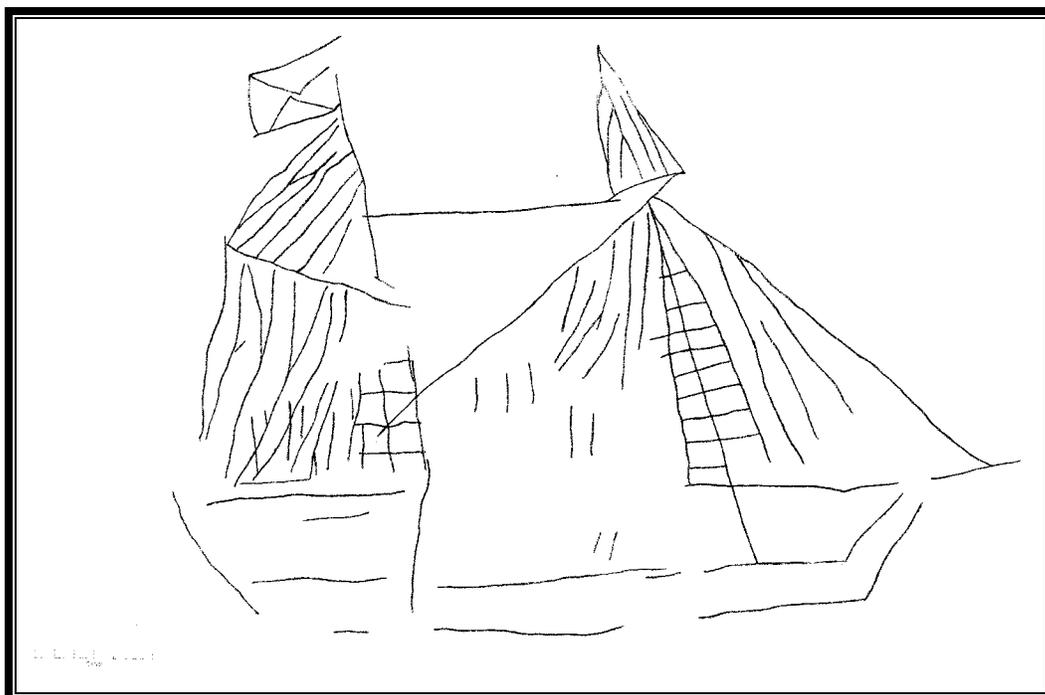


FIGURE 26b. Tracing of Schooner C shows details of sails and rigging.

Schooner C (Figures 26a and 26b) is a two-masted vessel that depicts ship rigging details not seen in the previous examples.

- Both masts are rigged with fore and aft sails.
- The fore and aft top main sail on the main mast is consistent with the rig of clipper schooners (MacGregor 1997:56-66).
- Each mast is shown to have three mast shrouds per side.
- The diagonal line leading from the fore mast to the main mast probably represents the fore mast stay.
- The horizontal line between the two top masts may represent the jumper stay (Bennet 2001:106-107).
- Major hull lines also seem to be represented on this graffito.
- Again, lines representing the two masts show only the main mast extending to the base of the hull which presumably represents the keel, while the line showing the fore mast is stepped considerably higher. As noted earlier, this could indicate unfamiliarity with the construction details of larger, ocean-going vessels which only called at Nassau but were never built locally.
- Flying atop the main mast is a British flag, although according to Gardiner (1993:15) it was rare for British schooners not to have squares sails on the top fore mast. Schooners were common merchant vessels in Britain and America. So this could be an American vessel docked in Nassau harbor but a courtesy ensign, the flag of the nation whose territory the ship was visiting. This tradition became commonplace in the 19th century (Wilson 1986:35).

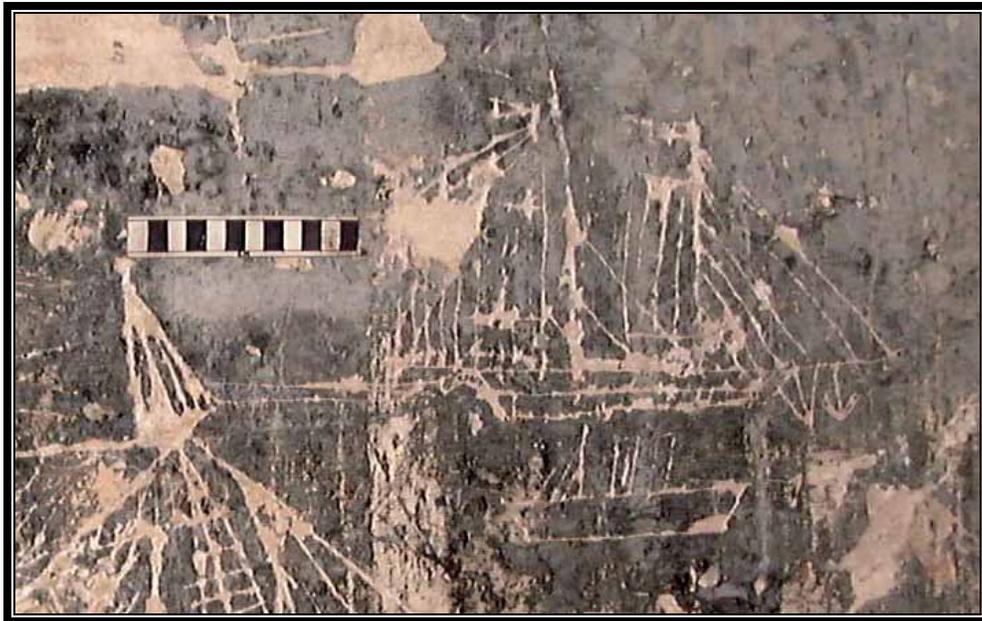


FIGURE 27a. Graffiti of a two-masted schooner (top) and a vessel that appears to have a fore sail as well as two smoke funnels.

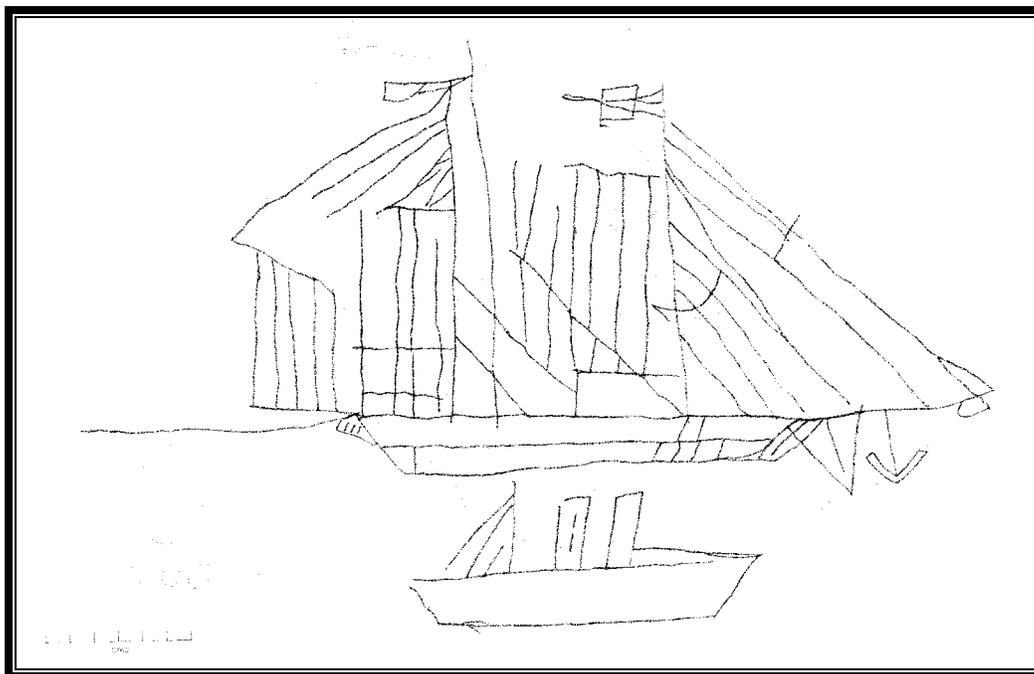


FIGURE 27b. Tracings of graffiti for Schooner D and an apparent Steam Schooner.

These two graffiti (Figures 27a and 27b) are unrelated but will be dealt with in one unit because they are so close together. The larger vessel is catalogued as Schooner D.

- This vessel has three masts; all rigged with fore and aft sails.
- The main and mizzen top masts also appear to be rigged with gaff top sails.
- Diagonal lines represent stays for the main and fore masts; but no fore stay sails are shown rigged on the jib boom.
- A rudder is shown (very small), the stem at the bow, and major lines along the hull. The horizontal line along the hull may represent the load line.
- Two anchors are shown hanging from the area of the bow.

The smaller graffito is a rare variety; it seems to have one mast and two smoke stacks.

- This graffito is an oddity not only within this collection but also for its rigging plan. It fits none of the standard descriptions for sailing ships with auxiliary steam-powered engines. Usually only larger vessels had more than one smoke stack but always had at least two masts (Tunis 2002:41-58).
- It is likely that these features of this graffito reflect the artist's lack of knowledge about this vessel type. Ships first crossed the Atlantic using sail and steam power from about 1820 (Tunis 2002:43). These vessels were especially designed for trans-oceanic voyages so Bahamian seamen would have had little, or no opportunity to sail as crewmen on any such ships. Indeed their main contact was, most likely, limited to seeing them docked in Nassau harbor. This could explain why this odd example is only recorded in the cellar jail cell near the harbor. It also would help explain the apparent disregard to the rigging details of this type vessel.

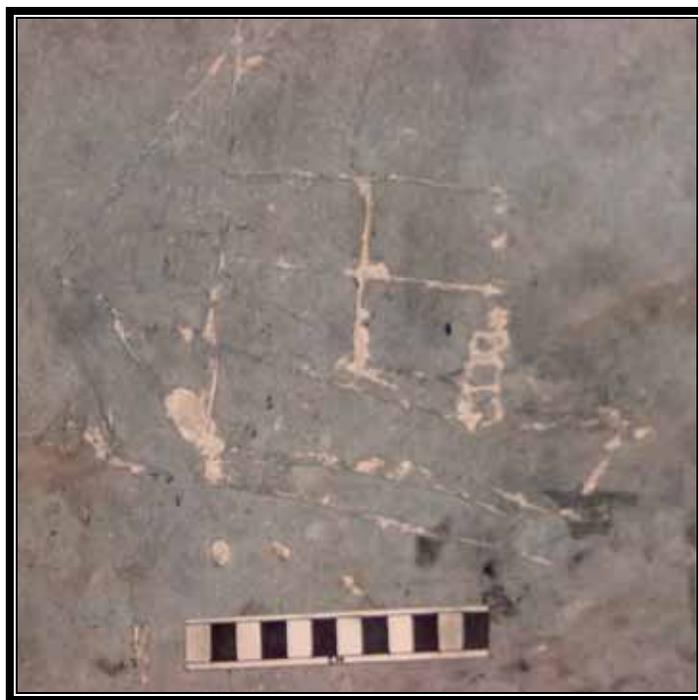


FIGURE 28a. Graffito of what appears to be a schooner. Schooner E.

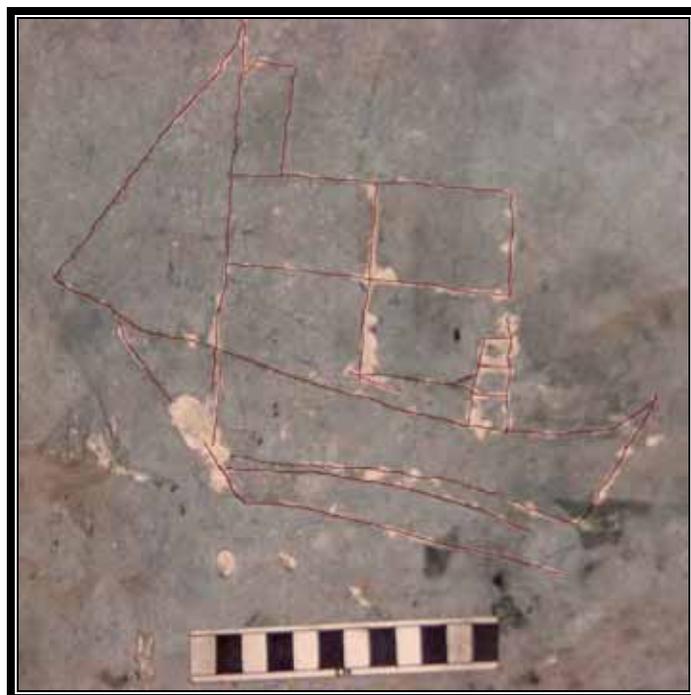


FIGURE 28b. Tracing of Schooner E.

This graffito (Figures 28a and 28b) is not only crudely drawn but may also have never been completed. It was interpreted as possibly a schooner because of several features about its rigging. Additionally, details on the hull were regarded as evidence of the artist's knowledge of ships.

- The diagonal line ending at the jib boom could represent a fore stay. It is probably not the fore sail of a sloop as it is missing the characteristic lines denoting fabric panels within the sail.
- The column of three rectangles could represent mast shrouds.
- It is uncertain what the large square subdivided into four smaller squares represents; it may even depict deck cargo.
- It is uncertain what the two horizontal lines on the hull were intended to portray. It is possible that these were intended to outline a reinforcing wale along the hull, or probably even to indicate the level of the vessel's waterline.



FIGURE 29a. Graffito of Schooner F, upper section of west wall.



FIGURE 29b. Tracing of Schooner F, near the south west corner of the cell wall.

Schooner F graffito (Figures 29a and 29b) is located high on the wall of the cell.

- Two masts with fore and aft sails. The masts only rake aft slightly.
- Only a narrow width of hull is shown, as when the vessel is afloat and fully loaded. So this artist may have recorded this vessel's hull just to the water line instead of projecting the image as far down as the keel.



FIGURE 30a. Graffito of Sloop C, high on west wall.

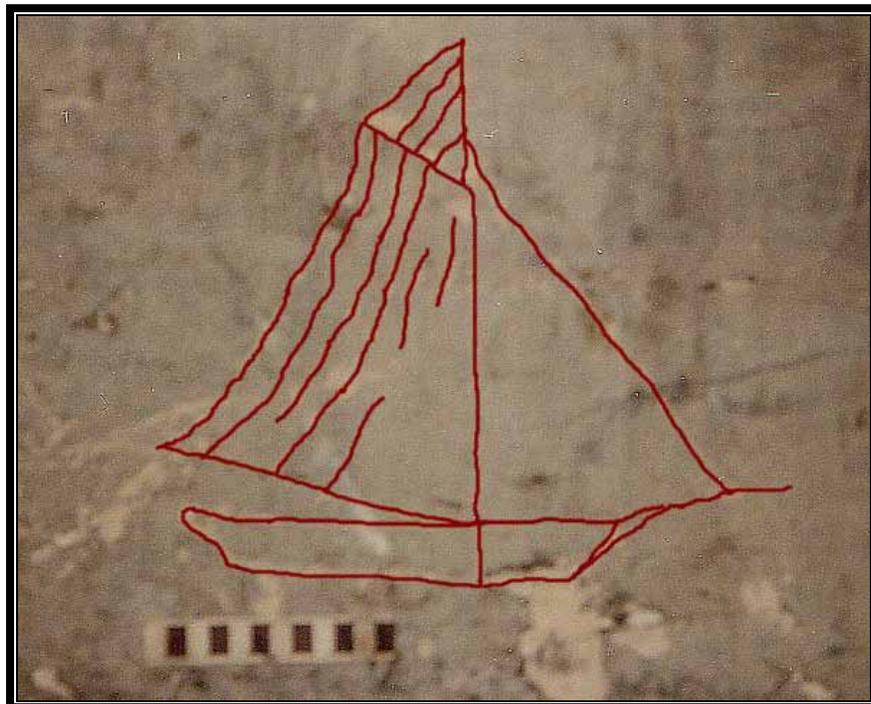


FIGURE 30b. Tracing of Sloop C from the upper west wall.

The graffito of Sloop C (Figures 30a and 30b) is inscribed high on the west wall and so was only accessible for photographs. Details of this vessel include:

- Fore and aft main sail.
- Lines above the gaff appear to represent a fore and aft top sail however it is also possible that they represent the halyards supporting the gaff.
- Instead of a fore sail, only the fore stay is shown attached to the jib boom; though evidence of the sail could have been eroded over time.
- The line representing the mast passes through the hull to indicate that it was stepped on the keel.
- The outline of the hull has a deliberately round stern probably to indicate a transomed stern.
- Lines differentiate the outline of the bow as distinct from the bobstays attached to the bow from the bowsprit.



FIGURE 31a. Graffito depicting possible Shallop. Graffito X, above right, shows several ships docked. Graffito Y, above left, was too heavily eroded to interpret.



FIGURE 31b. Tracing of possible Shallop A surrounded by other heavily eroded or unusual graffiti.

Although this graffito (Figures 31a and 31b) is heavily eroded, the lines depicting its sails appear to show:

- A two-masted vessel with a square sail on the main mast and possibly a fore and aft sail on the fore mast.
- The horizontal line along the hull may represent the water line.
- To the late 18th century the only small vessel that was rigged with a square main sail was the shallop. There were, however, a number of rigging plans included under the broad, general category of shallop. The term “shallop” was used by European navies into the 19th century, while, in America the catch-all term for small vessels was simply “boats” (Baker 1966:70-81; Dudszus & Henriot 1986:199-200).

This graffito, then, illustrates the great regional variety in small, coastal sailing vessels. Based on its shallop characteristics, this graffito is presumed to date to the early 19th century.

Graffito X, above the shallop, at right, was also a puzzling example. No tracing was done of this graffito as it appears to represent several hulls and just the spars; flags are shown flying atop some of these. This graffito seems to represent a crowded dock rather than the details of a single ship. While it is an unusual graffito example the image is consistent with the location so near the town’s busy harbor.

Another example, Graffito Y, above left of Shallop A, was also not traced. This example can still be discerned as a fairly detailed illustration of a ship under full sail. Nevertheless with the effect of eroding plaster this graffito example would be extremely difficult to trace and interpret based on the lines still visible.

## South Wall of Cell



FIGURE 32a. Eroded graffito, on lower south wall, depicting Schooner G.

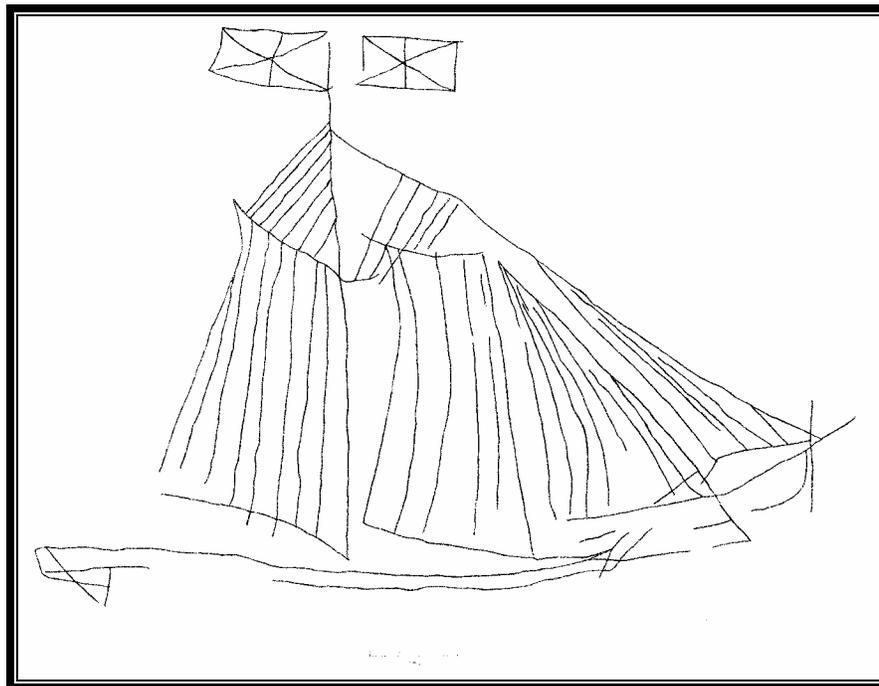


FIGURE 32b. Tracing of Schooner G from lower south wall of basement cell.

Although Schooner G (Figures 32a and 32b) is on the more heavily eroded area of the wall, sufficient detail of the sails and rigging remain in tact to allow some analysis to identify the vessel type. This graffito looks quite similar to Schooner B.

- Both the main and fore masts are rigged with fore and aft sails.
- A fore sail is shown on the fore mast. A flying jib sail is set on the fore stay attached to the jib boom.
- One of the two flags above the main mast presumably represents the union jack, while the other is likely a private company flag.
- Only the upper portion of the hull is still visible. These details include a second horizontal line parallel to the gunwale. The double lines seem to outline a reinforcing wale along the vessel's hull.
- Other details of the hull show a transomed stern, and the point at which the jib stays are fastened to the bow.



FIGURE 33a. Graffito of Brigantine B.



FIGURE 33b. Tracing of Brigantine B graffito.

The graffito, Brigantine B (Figures 33a and 33b) also depicts a brigantine.

- The fore mast of Brigantine B has fewer sails - a square fore sail, single fore top sail and single top gallant sail.
- Being a brigantine, the main mast is rigged only with fore and aft sails



Figure 34a. Graffito of Sloop D, upper south wall.

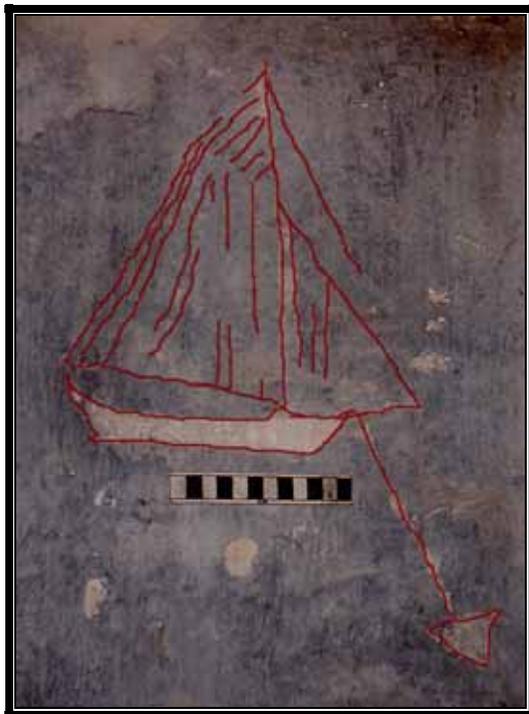


Figure 34b. Tracing of Sloop D graffito.

Sloop D (Figures 34a and 34b) is engraved high on the south wall, facing the door of the cell.

- Its sail plan shows a fore and aft main sail, along with a fore sail, or stay sail, on the single mast.
- Only part of the fore stay is visible, running from the mast to the jib boom.
- Lines above the main sail's gaff yard seem to represent a fore and aft top sail rather than rigging supporting the main sail. This fore and aft top sail increased the vessel's total sail area. It could have been added to help the sloop better handle distance travel. Published sources do not indicate such a rigging pattern for North American sloops (Baker 1966:70-81; 106-141). So this graffito could represent a locally-built vessel or one from another Caribbean port.
- Representation of the hull appears to show a stern heel on this vessel. This, however, may simply be a result of deterioration as plaster flakes off along the finely incised lines of the graffiti.
- Inclusion of the anchor indicates the vessel was docked, probably a few hundred meters away in Nassau's harbor.

## Cell's East Wall

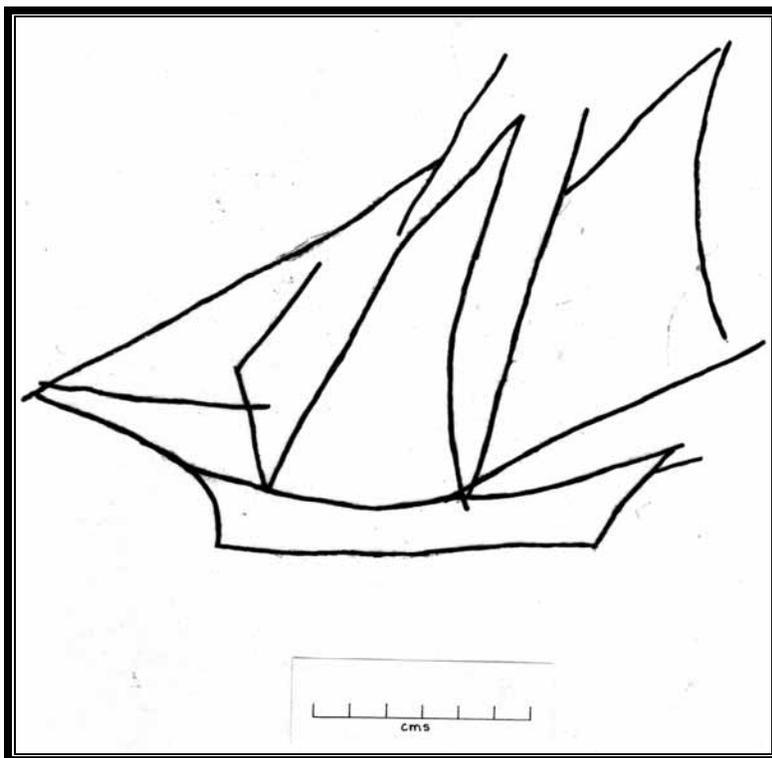


FIGURE 35. Tracing of Schooner H graffiti, upper portion of east wall.

No clear photograph was available for this graffiti (Figure 35). It was inscribed high on the east wall which gets very little light from the doorway; the only natural light source for this cell.

- Schooner H represents a two-masted vessel with both masts raked aft.
- The sail plan shows flying jib and fore stay sails on the jibboom; a fore and aft, or gaff fore sail; and a gaff main sail set on a boom.
- With no top sails, this graffiti is interpreted as an early 19th century schooner representation.

## San Salvador

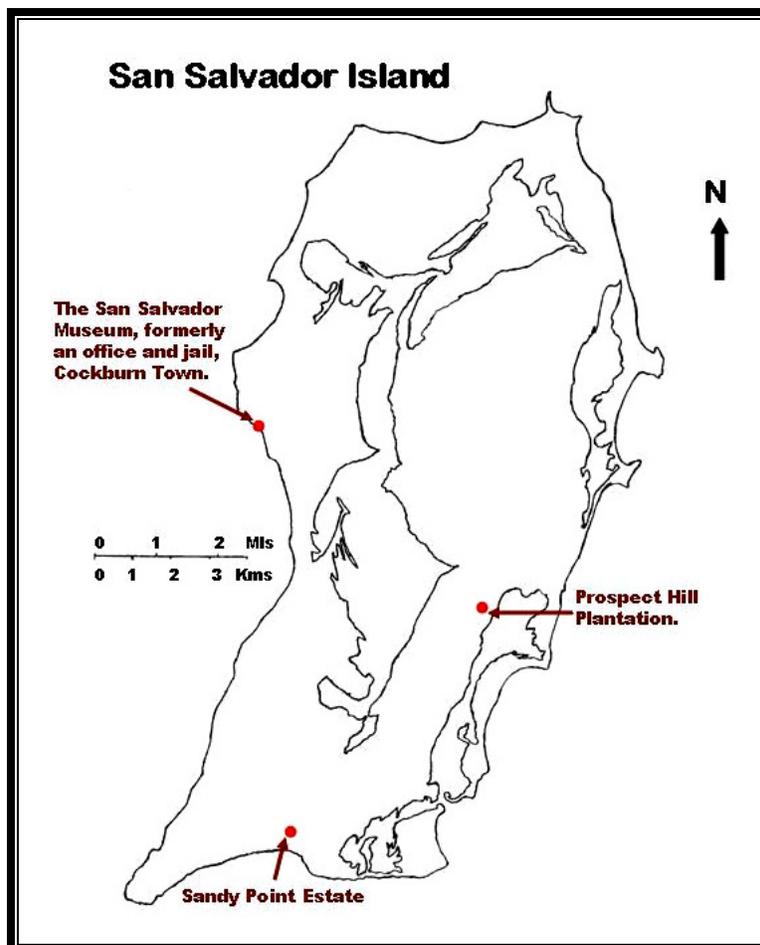


FIGURE 36. Map of San Salvador showing the locations of the three sites with documented ship graffiti on the island.

*Sandy Point Estate*

Ship graffiti were documented from two structures at *Sandy Point*. One example is at the main house and the others are clustered in and near windows of a work/storage building.

The view from this window is of the island's south eastern coastline (Figure 36).



FIGURE 37a. Photo of Schooner I graffiti on *Sandy Point* main house.

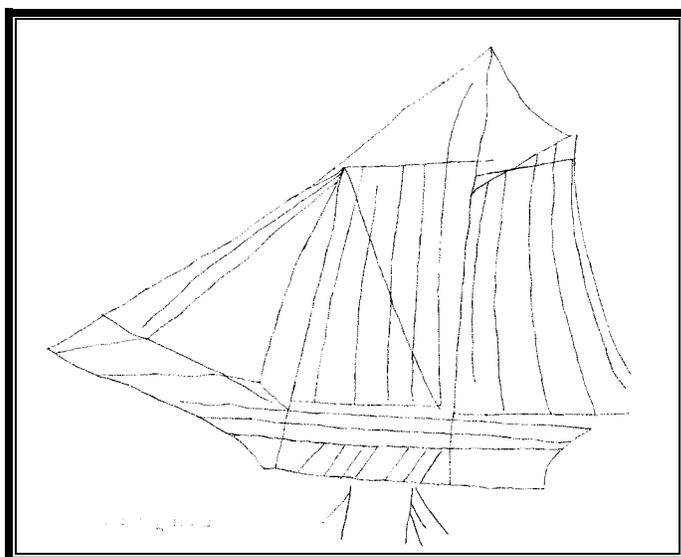


FIGURE 37b. Tracing of Schooner I, west wall of *Sandy Point* main house.

Schooner I (Figures 37a and 37b) is located on the exterior face of the west wall of the main house, near the door to the cellar. This is the only discernable ship graffito on any walls of the main house. At one time there probably were others; just below the Schooner I graffito are what appears to be the tops of masts on another ship graffito that has now been eroded to these few remaining lines.

- The two masts were a common feature for schooners but what makes this one unusual is that the fore mast is considerably shorter than the main mast. The only illustration of a similar spar plan is of a New England fishing schooner ca. 1870s (Gardiner 1993:14; MacGregor 1997:169, 173). This seems to have been a preferred feature adapted for the needs of island and coastal sailing.
- Both masts on this graffito extend to the base of the hull, assumed to be the keel.
- Fore and aft sails are set on both masts and set on the jib boom are flying jib and fore stay sails. The triangular section above the main mast may represent a gaff top sail.
- The single diagonal line across the fore sail appears to represent a topping lift to support the raising and lowering of the gaff.
- Two horizontal lines along the hull were probably intended to illustrate planking. Below the lower of these lines are seven diagonal lines. The overall effect implies changes in the shape of the hull. So the second horizontal line probably represents the water line for this vessel.



FIGURE 38a. Photo of Schooner J graffito, work/storage building.



FIGURE 38b. Tracing of Schooner J graffito.

Schooner J graffito (Figures 38a and 38b) is from an area of the wall, to the left of the window, that has a cluster of ship graffiti. This graffito overlaps what appears to be a gaff sail from an unfinished ship graffito at its lower right edge. Some of the lines included within this example may have originally been part of other ship graffiti this one happened to overlap.

- This vessel is a two-masted schooner with fore and aft sails on both masts. The lighter lines in the area for the fore sail are possibly part of an earlier graffito this example was incised on top of.
- The diagonal lines to the jib boom suggest the sails set there are a flying jib, inner jib, standing jib, and fore stay sails (Bennet 2001:126; Biddlecombe 1925:71; MacGregor 1997:95). The diagonal lines from the main mast to the fore mast and its rigging probably represent the main mast stays.
- The curved lines below the jib boom represent the ends of the stays. These would be attached to the ship's bow.



FIGURE 39a. Schooner K graffiti is located on the wall near a window with more ship graffiti.

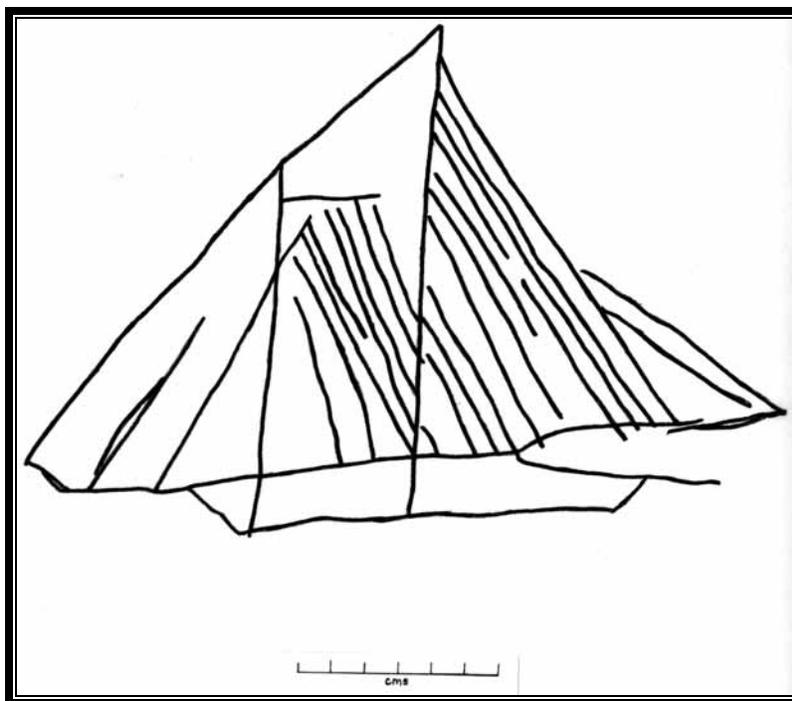


FIGURE 39b. Tracing of Schooner K graffiti, *Sandy Point*.

Although it is now quite eroded, the vessel type depicted by the Schooner K graffito (Figures 39a and 39b) is evident. The artist's own style of artistic license also has to be filtered through in order to make interpretive assumptions.

- It is a two-masted schooner with fore and aft sails.
- Lines above the gaff of the fore sail seem to represent the peak halyards for this yard, while the greater number of fine lines above the main sail may suggest a gaff top sail on that mast.
- Diagonal lines to the jib boom seem to represent mast stays. No sails are shown set on these lines.
- As seen quite often on these graffiti, the masts are shown extending to the ship's keel.
- The effects of erosion on the plaster may have erased details of any hull lines the artist originally included on this vessel.

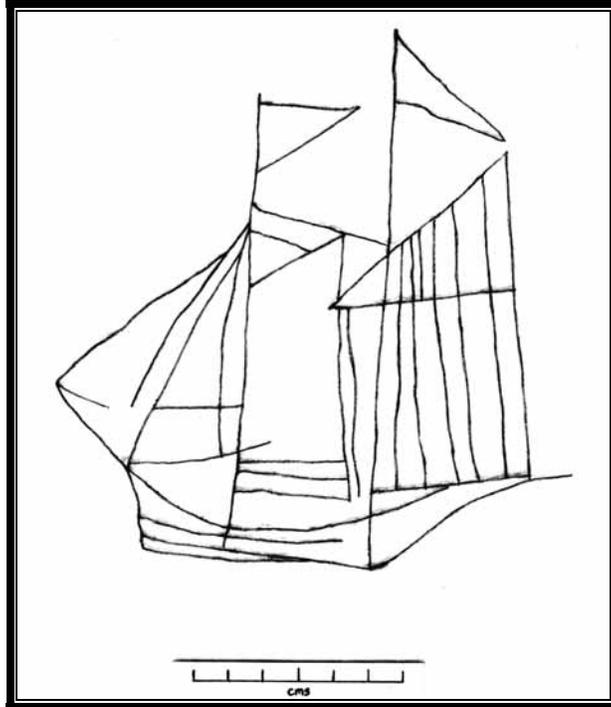


FIGURE 40. Tracing of Schooner L, *Sandy Point* estate.

This graffito (Figure 40) is from the window jamb of the work/storage building.

- It represents a two-masted schooner with fore and aft sails on both masts, along with jib and fore stay sails on the jib boom.
- The two lines across the lower end of the fore sail appear to be reef bands which are reinforced strips of fabric intended to strengthen the sail where reef points are secured. Reefing a sail reduces its area to better withstand heavy winds (Biddlecombe 1925:23-24; Course 1963:157-158; Lever 1808:54).
- The diagonal line from the fore mast to the head of the fore sail represents the peak halyard used to hoist the gaff.
- The other diagonal line between the two masts probably represents a jumper stay.
- Horizontal lines on the hull show planking while the curved line conveys the transition from the wider upper deck to the narrower area below the water line.



FIGURE 41. Tracings of Schooner M (top) and Sloop E (below).

The graffiti of Schooner M and Sloop E (Figure 41) are also from the window of the *Sandy Point* work/storage building. Although the outlines of these examples are now quite faint enough details remain to determine on the types of vessel depicted.

Schooner M:

- It has two masts; both raked slightly aft.
- Both sails are gaff, or fore and aft.
- The diagonal line from the fore mast to the jib boom represents the fore mast stay but there appears to be no fore stay sail set on this rig.

Sloop E:

- Has one mast rigged with a triangular fore sail and a gaff main sail.
- The topmost diagonal line leading from the mast to the (no longer visible) jib boom represents the mast stay.

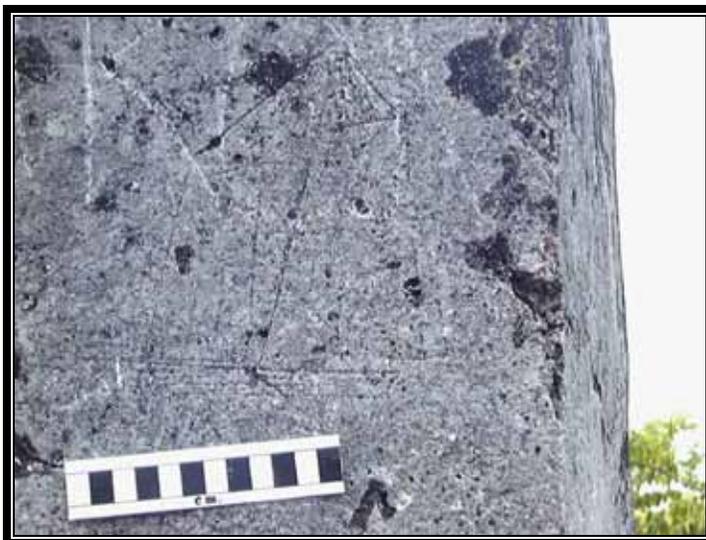


FIGURE 42a. Photograph of Sloop F graffiti on the window jamb.

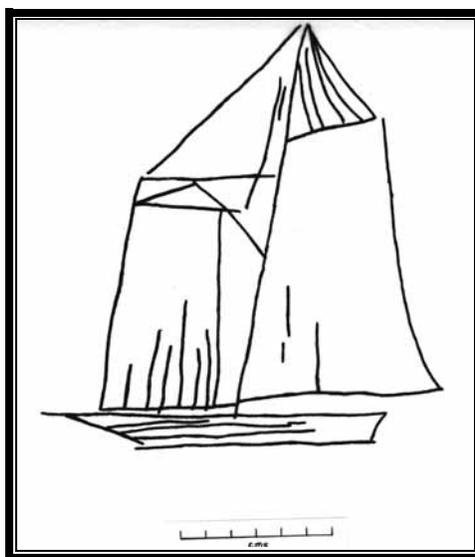


FIGURE 42b. Tracing of Sloop F graffiti, *Sandy Point* estate.

Sloop F (Figures 42a and 42b) seems to be another oddity in this array of vessel types.

- It has a fore and aft main sail supported by peak halyards.
- It appears the size of the fore sail was reduced to include some unknown detail.
- Horizontal lines on the hull simply show planking details.

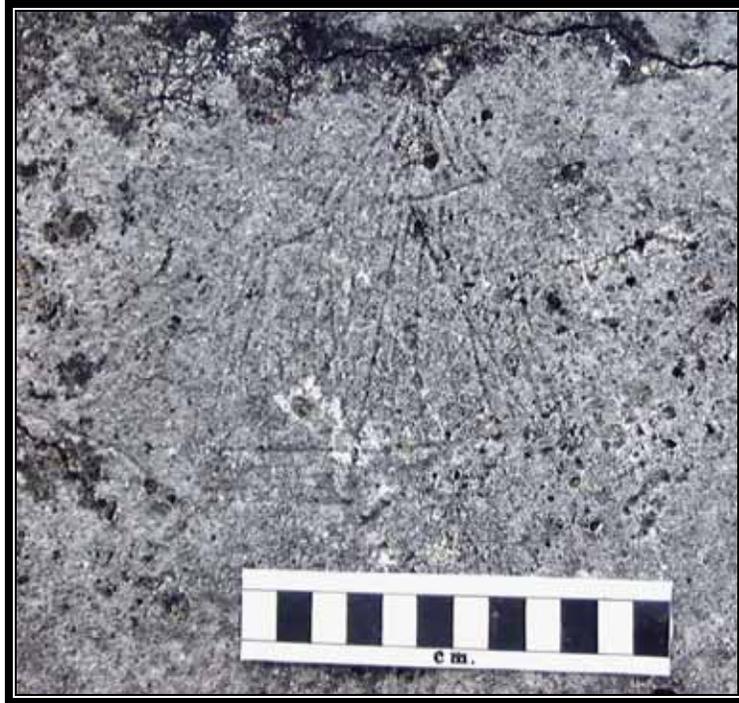


FIGURE 43a. Photograph of Schooner N graffiti on wall near window.

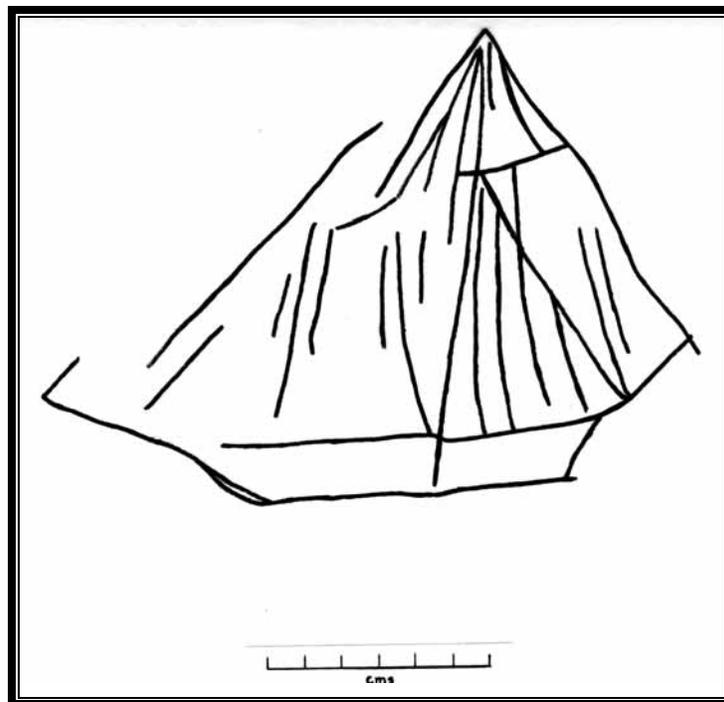


FIGURE 43b. Tracing of Schooner N graffiti, *Sandy Point* estate.

The graffito of Schooner N (Figures 43a and 43b) is from the wall near the window of the work/storage building. This ship graffito includes quite a bit of detail, although much of it has now been eroded. The vessel it depicts shows the following details:

- A two-masted schooner with masts raked aft.
- Diagonal lines from the jib boom suggest a fore stay sail and flying jib were indicated. The line from the main mast to the jib boom probably represents the main mast stay.
- Rigging details depicted include the peak halyards on the gaffs for both the main and fore sails, and the topping lift for the main sail.
- The line for the mast is extended as far as the base of the vessel, which represents the keel.
- Evident on the photograph of this graffito are portions of at least three horizontal lines on the hull. These were probably intended to denote hull planking lines.



FIGURE 44a. Ship graffiti on window jamb crossed out.

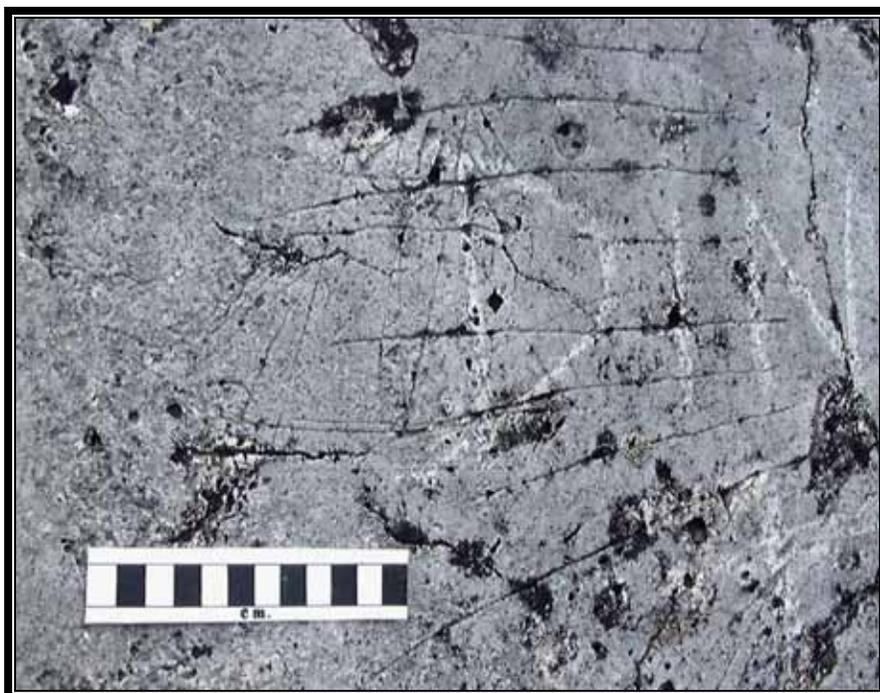


FIGURE 44b. Graffiti of a schooner on the wall near window and crossed out later.

On the right side of the north window's jamb, as well as on the interior wall nearby, a number of ship graffiti have been covered up by lines later drawn over them. For those on the window jamb (Figure 44a), it appears that lines were deliberately scored into the plaster to obliterate them. Why these particular graffiti examples would be later "discarded" is uncertain, but this case can support the hypothesis that Bahamian ship graffiti were created as some sort of record that could even be "adjusted." On the other hand, although the schooner graffiti on the wall adjacent to the window (Figure 44b) was partially crossed out, the series of fairly regularly spaced horizontal lines may have been done to prepare the surface of the wall for a new coat of plaster that was never applied. This is feasible since *Sandy Point* was occupied until the early 20th century.

These "discarded" examples of ship graffiti are therefore significant because they provide some insight on the long-term cultural value of ship graffiti. It is indeed important to note that later occupants of this plantation apparently changed their minds about covering up the ship graffiti even though they probably were no longer part of an active recording system.



FIGURE 45a. Photo of a number of incomplete ship graffiti at *Sandy Point* estate.

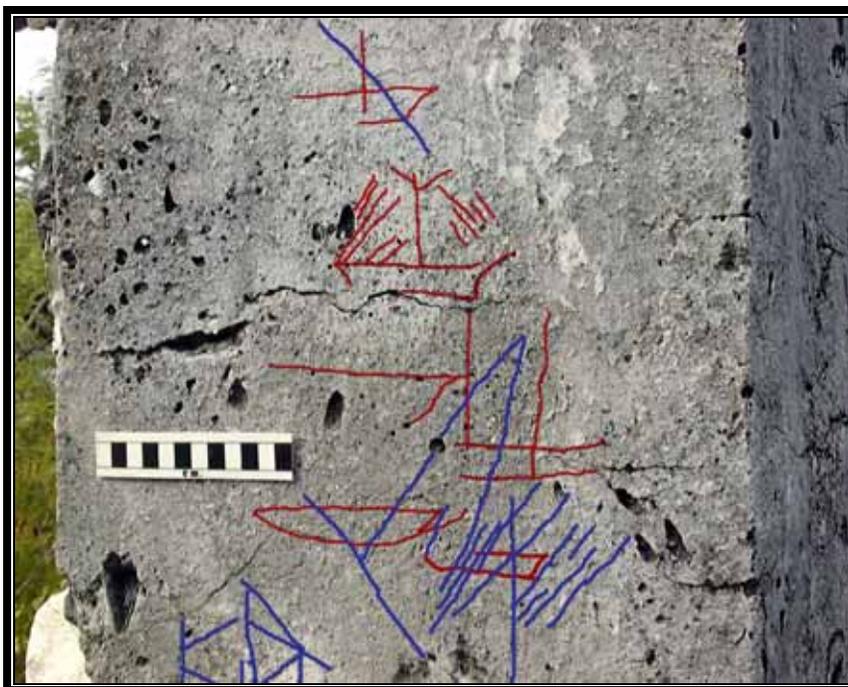


FIGURE 45b. Tracing of incomplete ship graffiti crossed out.

Figures 45a and b show a cluster of small ship graffiti on the window jamb of the eastern window.

- These examples consist of at least six ship hulls, some with masts, but with little or no details of sails or rigging. Seemingly, none of these ship graffiti were ever completed, although it is possible that the effects of erosion on the plaster surface have erased the more lightly incised lines representing sails and any rigging details.
- What is apparent from these images, however, is that attempts were apparently made to obscure them. As *Sandy Point* was continuously occupied for over 100 years, it is possible that a later generation of inhabitants might have no longer needed to refer to the ship graffiti and so tried to delete them.
- Examples such as this group of graffiti present the likelihood that Bahamian ship graffiti had a specific period of usefulness after which they could be “discarded” in this manner.

Prospect Hill plantation



FIGURE 46a. Photo of Schooner O, main house kitchen, *Prospect Hill*, San Salvador.

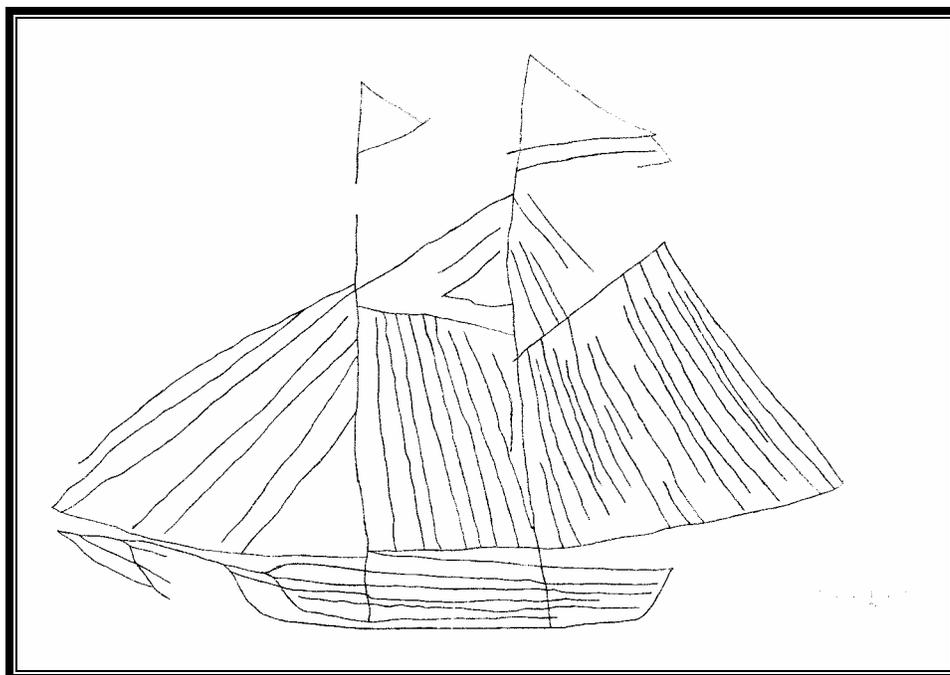


FIGURE 46b. Tracing of Schooner O, *Prospect Hill* plantation, San Salvador.

Schooner O graffito (Figures 46a and 46b) is from an exterior wall of the main house kitchen at *Prospect Hill*. This graffito is fairly complete but is partially obscured by microbial growth on the wall.

- This is a two-masted schooner.
- Both masts are rigged with fore and aft sails.
- Rigging details show peak halyards on the main sail gaff, as well as the fore mast and main mast stays attached to the jib boom.
- Additional diagonal lines from the fore mast to the jib boom suggest these were intended to depict at least a fore stay sail and possibly a jib sail also.
- Details of the hull include several horizontal lines which, presumably, denote the outlines of the hull's planking. The forward end of at least two of these lines curve upward following the outline of the bow. Such details support the notion that these ship graffiti artists were familiar, not only with the rigging of the vessels they drew, but with the construction of their hulls as well.



FIGURE 47a. Photo of Sloop G graffiti, main house kitchen, *Prospect Hill*.

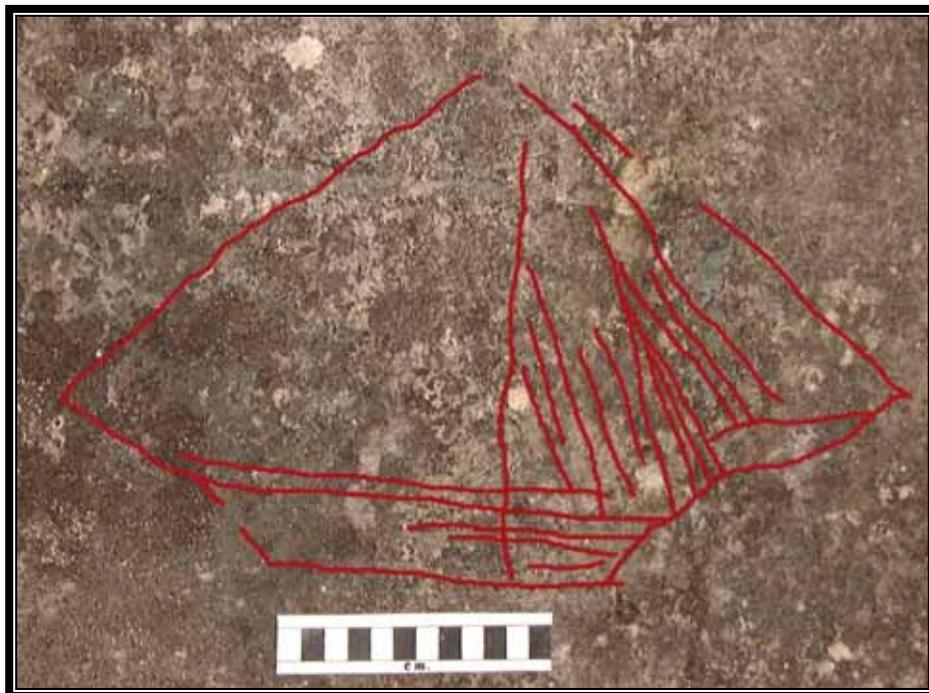


FIGURE 47b. Tracing of Sloop G.

The Sloop G graffito (Figures 47a and 47b) is heavily obscured by microbial growth on the wall's surface. Enough of it is visible, however, to determine a basic outline and some details on the fore sail, rigging and hull.

- The single mast and fore and aft sails categorize this graffito as the image of a sloop.
- The mast is drawn to the base of the hull (representing the keel) as is often seen in these graffiti.
- Diagonal lines on the fore sail indicate the panels of fabric the sail is comprised of.
- The curved line at the base of diagonal lines leading to the jib boom suggests a jib sail.
- As seen on a number of other examples, the horizontal line segments still visible on this ship graffito are assumed to denote hull planking.

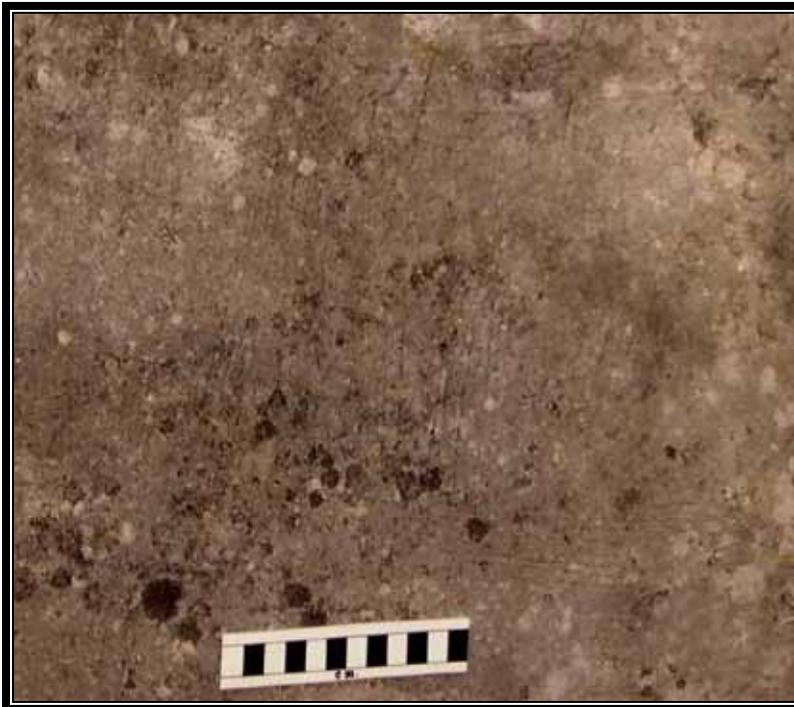


FIGURE 48a. Photo of Schooner P graffito, *Prospect Hill*, San Salvador.

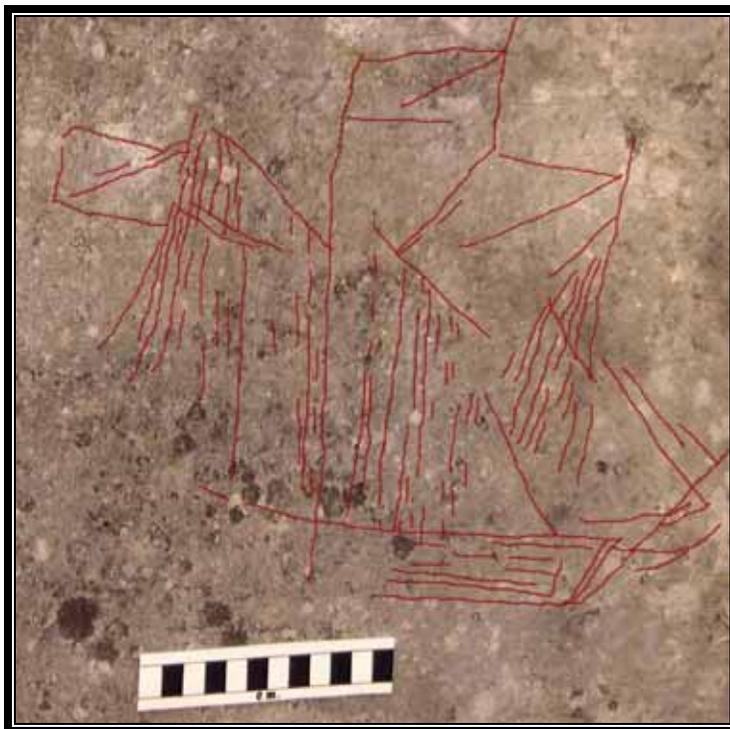


FIGURE 48b. Tracing of Schooner P graffito.

Details of Schooner P graffito (Figures 48a and 48b) are also heavily obscured by texture and coloration of the plastered surface. Based on details that are visible it appears that is:

- A three-masted schooner. Portions of three vertical lines are evident above the sails, although only segments of two can clearly be traced through to the hull.
- All sails, including top sails, are fore and aft sails. The sail furthest aft is the largest. Jib sails are also set on stays on the jib boom. The curved end of one of these stay lines is visible near the point it is attached to the hull.
- There appears to be a flag on the mizzen mast but it is uncertain whether this flag is part of this graffito or some remnant of another example. Atop the main mast there also appears to be a flag for this graffito and since these lines are quite faint, it is difficult to determine their significance. They were included, however, because straight horizontal and diagonal lines are not within the usual erosion pattern for lime plaster surfaces.

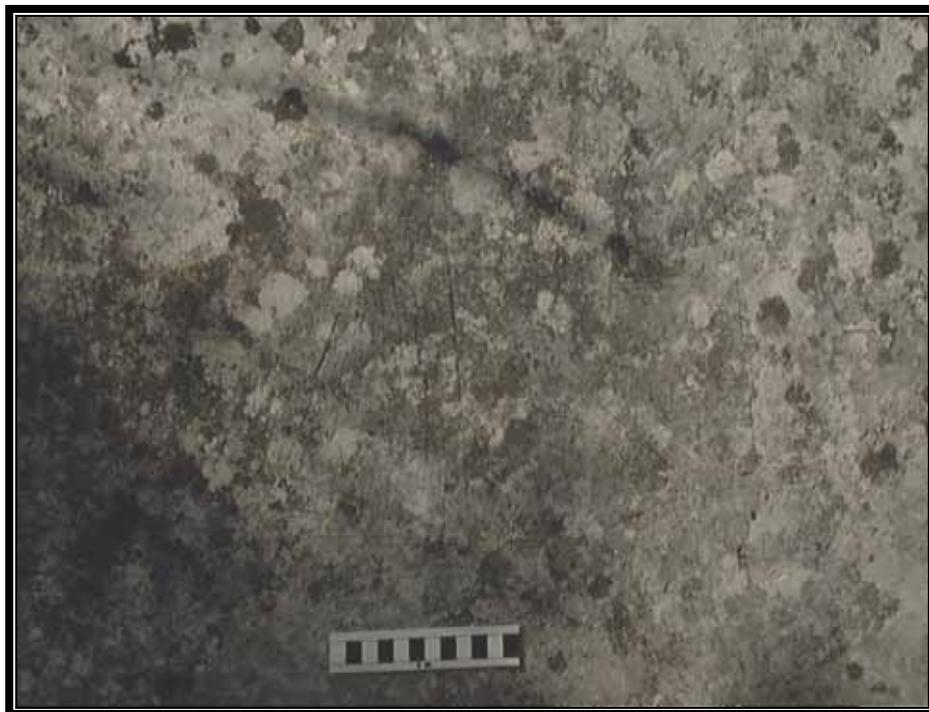


FIGURE 49a. Photo of Sloop H graffiti, main house kitchen, *Prospect Hill*.

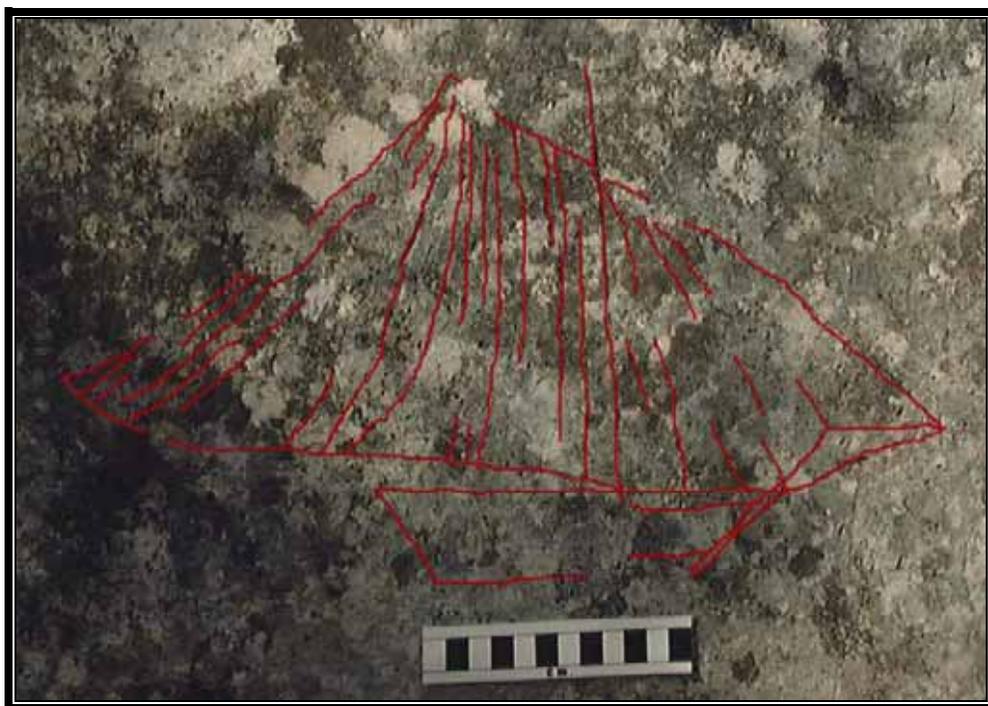


FIGURE 49b. Tracing of Sloop H graffiti, *Prospect Hill* plantation.

The graffito of Sloop H (Figures 49a and 49b) is on the interior wall of the main house kitchen. While the general lines of this graffito are still largely intact, there was some difficulty in distinguishing the lines composing Sloop H graffito from the many unrelated lines of a number of earlier ship graffito.

- It is possible that the section of the main sail which extends aft of the stern was not originally part of Sloop H graffito; especially since the hull seems so short in comparison to the sail area. Alternately, lines for the aftermost segment of the hull may have been eroded.
- The vessel has a single mast that is rigged with a fore and aft main sail, fore sail and flying jib.
- The bobstay is the diagonal line between the bowsprit and the bow of the vessel.
- On the hull there are very faint segments of several horizontal lines assumed to indicate details of hull planking.



FIGURE 50a. Photo of ship graffiti montage, interior kitchen wall, *Prospect Hill*.

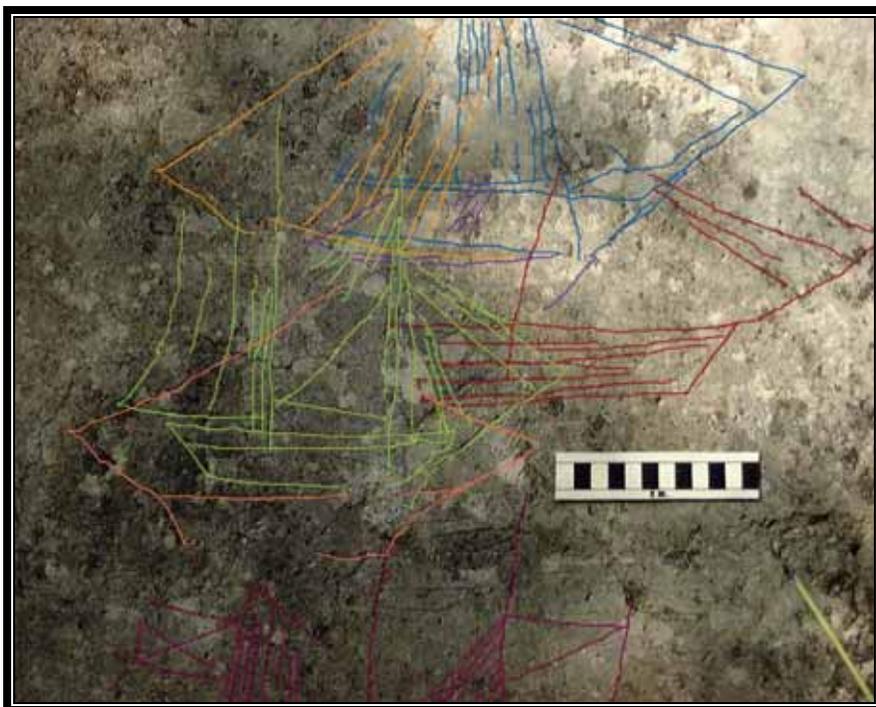


FIGURE 50b. Tracings of overlapping ship graffiti, *Prospect Hill*.

This cluster of overlapping ship graffiti (Figures 50a and 50b) comes from an interior wall of the main house kitchen at *Prospect Hill*. In this image a total of seven vessels, sloops and schooners were highlighted, each in a different color; including the top of Schooner P. Complete outlines are no longer visible for any of this group of graffiti. Instead, they were included as an illustration of how ship graffiti were treated by those who created them.

- They were evidently not intended as works of art but seemed to serve some functional purpose which, once noted and duly recorded, did not preclude later examples being added on top of earlier examples.
- These graffiti are on an interior wall, neither are they near a window so the location of ship graffiti apparently had little to do with being able to see the vessel being recorded.
- It seems access to a suitable recording surface was more important in determining where examples of ship graffiti would be located.



FIGURE 51a. Graffiti of Schooners Q and R, *Prospect Hill* main house.

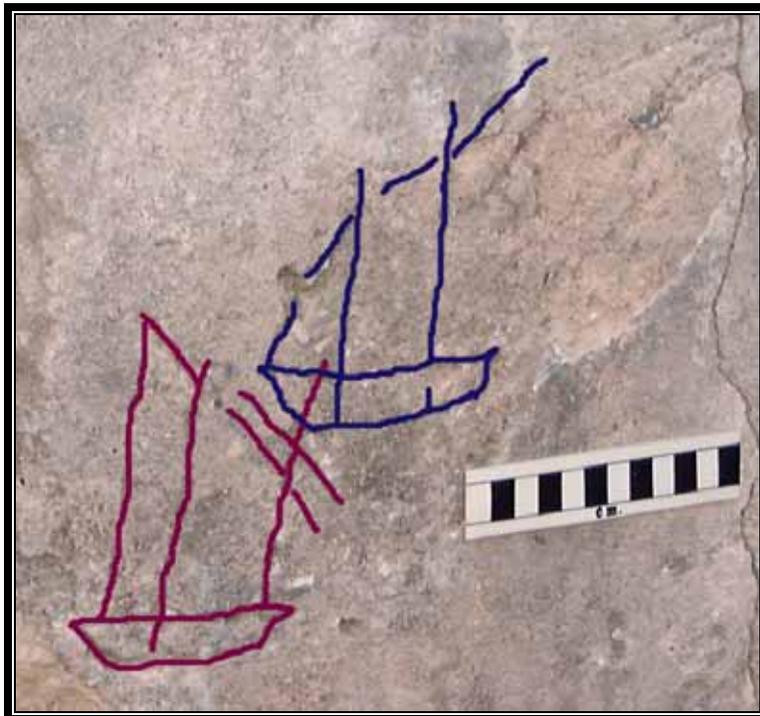


FIGURE 51b. Tracings of Schooners Q (left) and R (right) graffiti.

The graffiti of Schooners Q and R (Figures 51a and 51b) were documented from an exterior wall of the main house at *Prospect Hill*. Although these examples are heavily eroded and only some basic lines are still visible, they were interpreted as schooners because both examples have vertical lines representing masts. Based on the lines that are still visible, it seems that these were originally very simple examples of ship graffiti.

#### Schooner Q:

- The longest diagonal line seems to represent the gaff of the fore and aft main and fore sails.
- The shorter diagonal line suggests a gaff top sail on the main mast.
- The third vertical line near the bow is probably the leading edge of the fore sail.

#### Schooner R:

- The lines representing the head of the gaff main and fore sails are still visible.
- The diagonal line leading to the stern represents the fore mast stay.



FIGURE 52a. Two ship graffiti on main house, *Prospect Hill*.

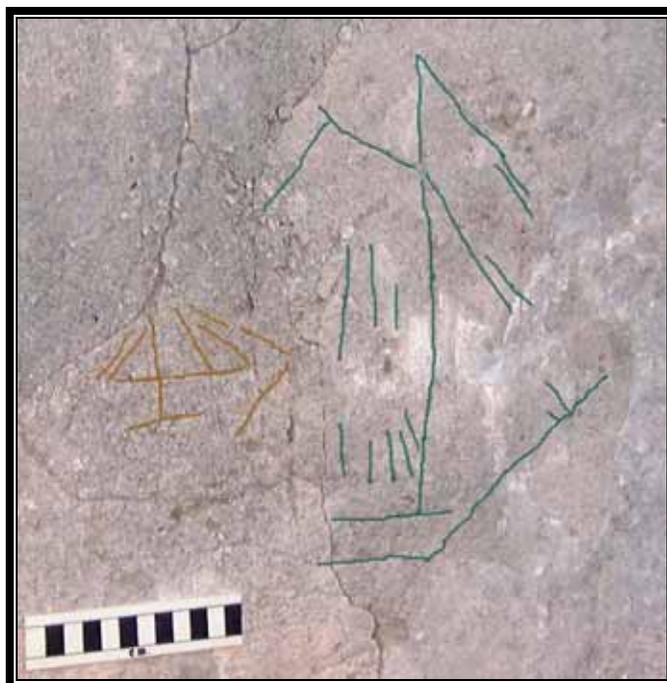


FIGURE 52b. Tracings of Sloop I (left) and Schooner S (right).

Sloop I and Schooner S (Figures 52a and 52b) were also documented from an exterior wall of *Prospect Hill's* main house.

Sloop I:

- This graffito was interpreted as a sloop based on the apparent position of a single mast close to the center of the hull.
- Several diagonal lines leading from the hull toward the mast support this assumption.

Schooner S:

- This graffito was interpreted as a schooner based on the forward position of the only mast visible.
- The acute angle at which the jib boom is set was also an indication that this is a schooner.
- Only a portion of the fore sail is visible.
- The uppermost diagonal line leading to the jib boom represents the main mast stay, while the lower line would be the fore mast stay. Jib sails were probably shown on these lines originally but have been erased as the plaster eroded.

San Salvador Museum/Jail



FIGURE 53. San Salvador jail - Ship graffiti is only in the cell on the left.



FIGURE 54a. Photo of Schooner T graffiti, San Salvador jail cell.

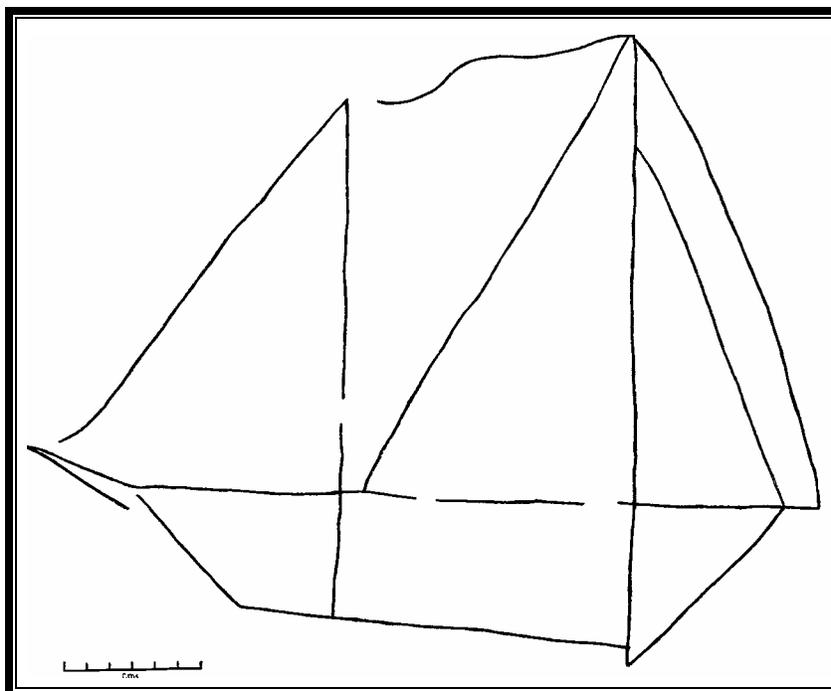


FIGURE 54b. Tracing of Schooner T graffito.

This example is the only graffito depicting a schooner at this 20th century site (Figure 53). Except for the line probably representing a pennant flying atop one of the masts, this graffito (Figures 54a and 54b) was executed in very straight lines suggesting that a straight-edged aid was used to incise it into the plaster.

- Schooner T has two masts which extend to the base of the vessel.
- The two forward diagonal lines probably represent the fore and main mast stays rather than sails. While the two lines leading aft from the main mast are possibly the main mast back stays.
- With a clear view of the dock nearby it is possible that this and all the other ship graffito at the jail cell site depict local vessels that were docked in the harbor.

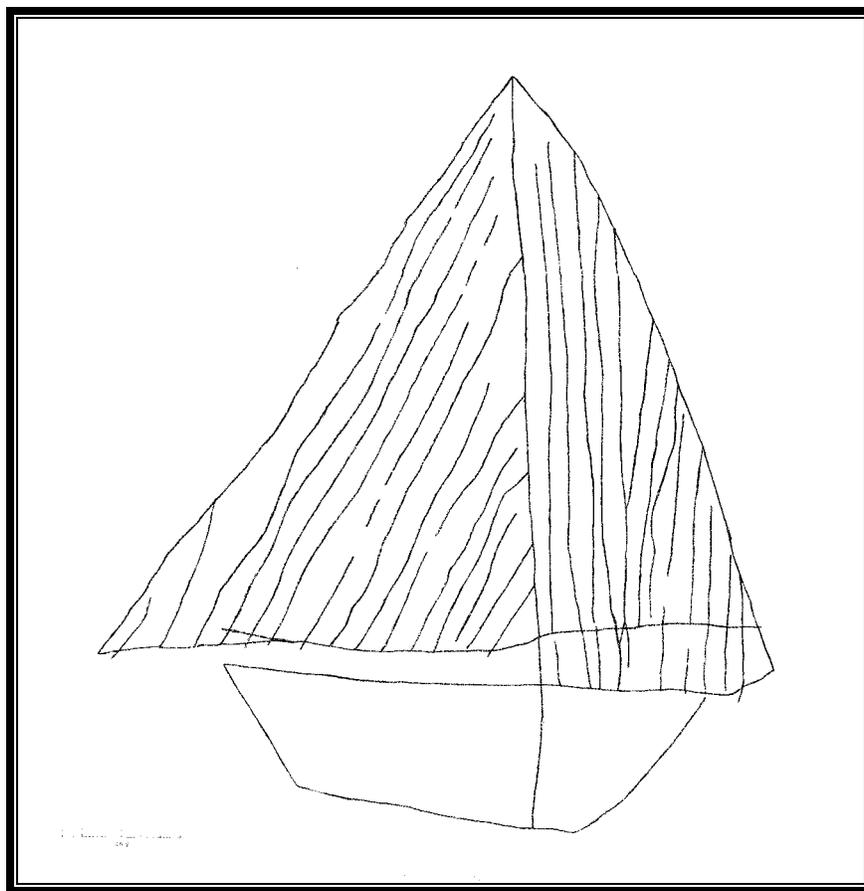


FIGURE 55. Graffito of Sloop J, San Salvador jail.

The graffito of Sloop J (Figure 55) is also very simple.

- The mast is set forward in the hull and is shown extending to the baseline.
- Lines of fabric panels within the sails are drawn differently to distinguish between the main sail and the fore sail. On the main sail these lines are diagonal but are vertical for the fore sail.
- The foot of the fore sail ends at the gunwale.
- One notable feature of all the sloop graffiti at this site is the very small extension of the jib sail beyond the bow, suggesting a short or non-existent bowsprit on these vessels (also Sloops M and N, on pages 138 and 139 respectively). This

could be a local rigging detail. In writing about local sailing craft of the 1950s and 1960s, William Johnson, Jr. (2000:22-26) describes and illustrates “the bare-head boat” which had no bowsprit so the jib sail was attached to the stem head. These vessels generally transported cargo among the islands of the archipelago. Examples of sloop graffiti that are presumed to be earlier, such as the example at *Clifton* (Figure 14b, page 70), include a more substantial bowsprit. As the early 20th century graffiti examples correspond closely the mid-20th century description, it is assumed that this innovation dates at least to the late 19th century. If this is indeed the case, then an examination of Bahamian ship graffiti can potentially help trace the development of local boatbuilding features. This is especially important because no other historical documentation available can satisfy such research questions. Being able to recognize these changes is also critical in helping to date the graffiti.

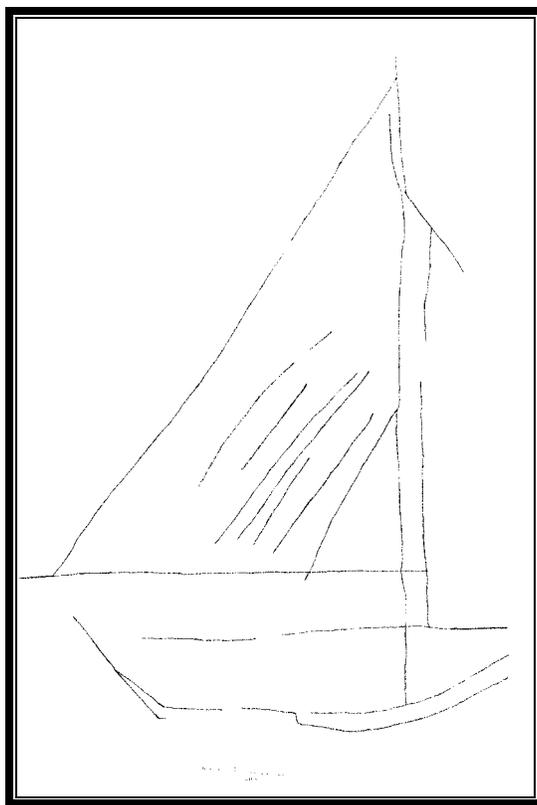


FIGURE 56. Tracing of Sloop K graffito.

The graffito of Sloop K (Figure 56) is slightly more detailed but the entire forward end of the vessel has been obscured; possibly by repairs to the plastered surface.

- The main sail is depicted with several diagonal lines indicating strips of fabric in the sail.
- As shown on Sloop J, this fore sail extends to the gunwale.
- It seems the outline of the keel is shown on the hull. The mast sits atop the keel.

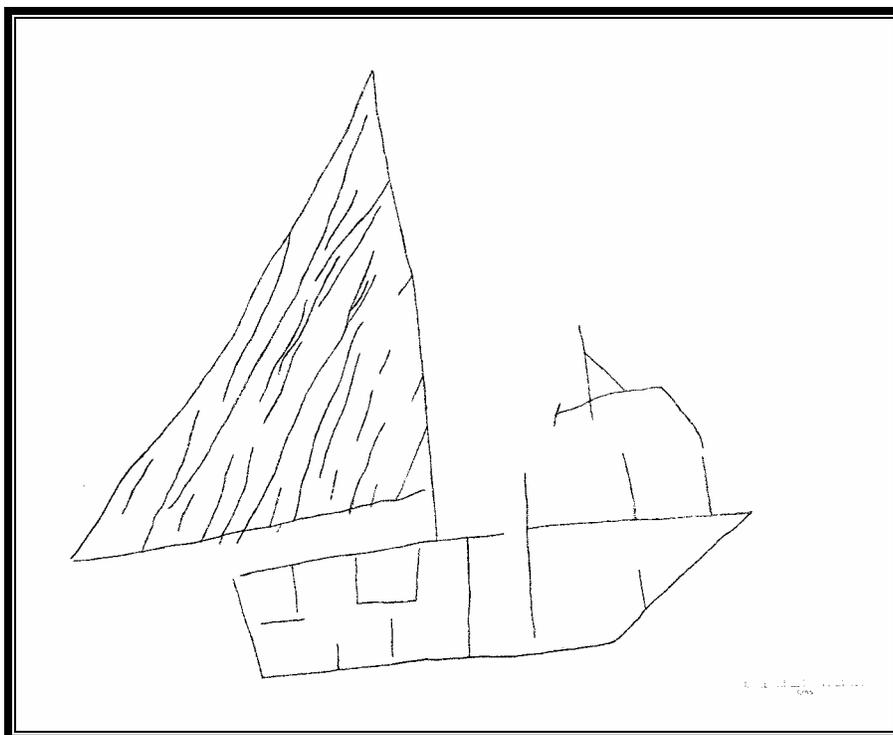


FIGURE 57. Tracing of 20th century graffito, Sloop L.

Sloop L graffito (Figure 57) has simple lines but evidently attempts to illustrate a number of features on this vessel.

- Only the main sail is shown on the mast.
- The feature at the stern may represent some sort of lifting device.

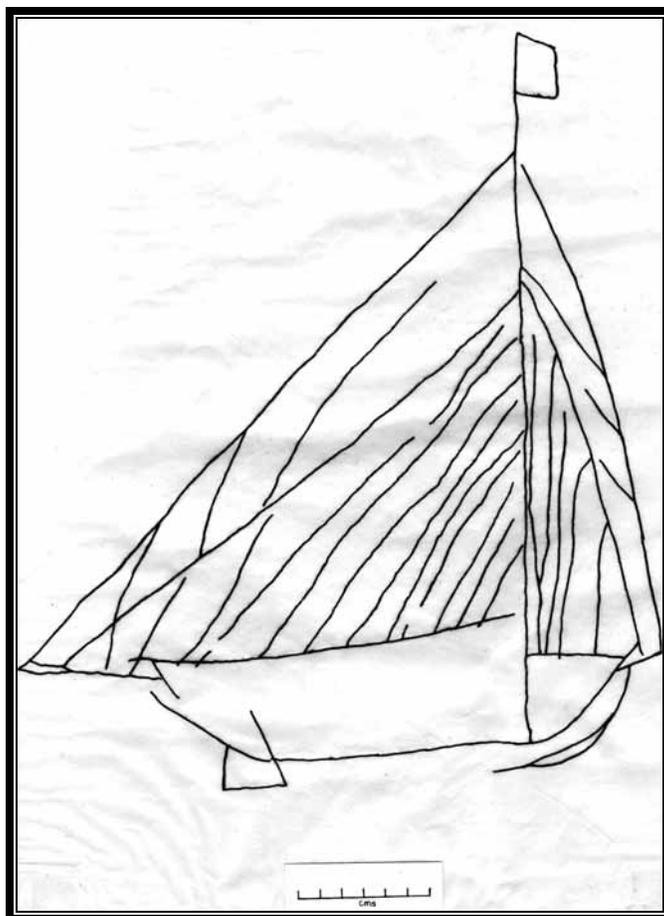


FIGURE 58. Graffito of Sloop M.

The graffito of Sloop M (Figure 58) is fairly detailed.

- The main and fore sails are shown with the characteristic fabric lines drawn at different angles on each sail.
- The diagonal line across both sails probably represents the topping lift for each sail.
- Some detail of the base of the hull is shown on this graffito.
- A longer length on the fore sail seems to have been characteristic of this variety of sloop.

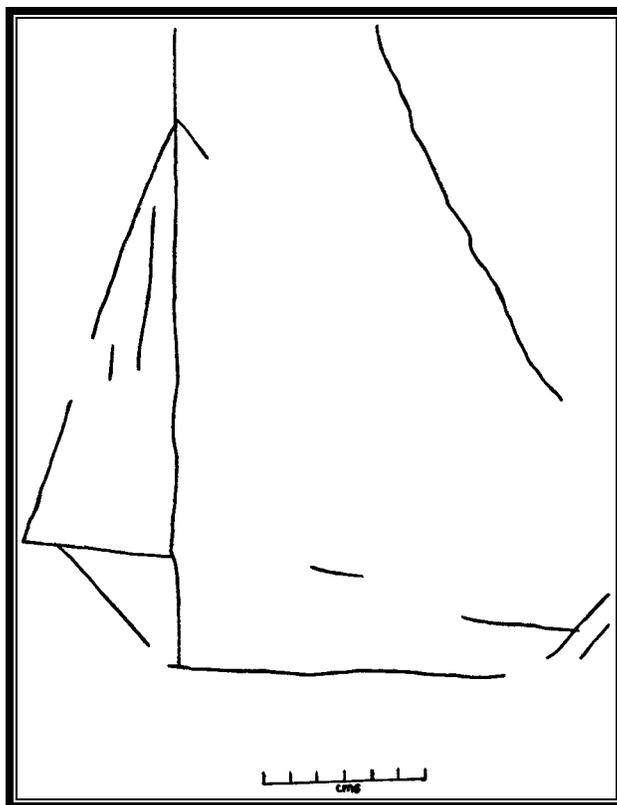


FIGURE 59. Tracing of Sloop N graffito.

The top and after segments of Sloop N (Figure 59) graffito are no longer visible, possibly also covered over by later plaster repairs. Enough key details remain to allow some assessment of the image.

- The diagonal line between the mast and the stern may represent the mast stay.
- As is the case with all other sloop graffiti at this site, the mast is set forward in the hull.

Based on some common details of sloop graffiti from the jail cell it is assumed that this group of ship graffiti gives an idea of what Bahamian sloops would have looked like in the early 20th century.

## Turks & Caicos Islands

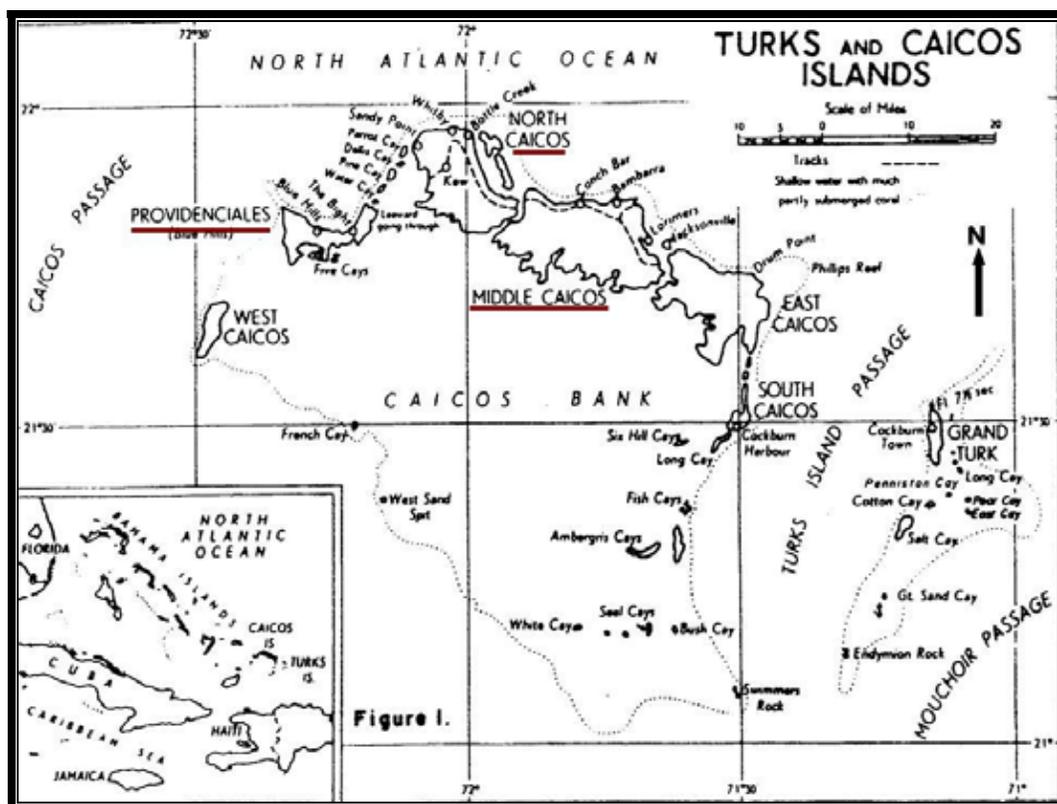


FIGURE 60. Detail of the Turks & Caicos Islands, southern end of the Bahama archipelago.

Historically Bermudians treated the Turks & Caicos Islands (Figure 60) separately from the Bahama Islands. Bermudians collected salt from the numerous salt ponds on these islands and many of them also owned plantations there (Williams 1989:13). From the late 18th century to the mid 19th century they were administered as part of the Bahamas. Despite strong political differences between the two segments of the archipelago, there was some shared interest in shipping. Ship graffiti of the type documented for this research are only found in the Bahamian archipelago. All ship graffiti sites in the Turks & Caicos Islands date to the plantation period of the early 19th century (Figure 61).

Providenciales

Cheshire Hall estate

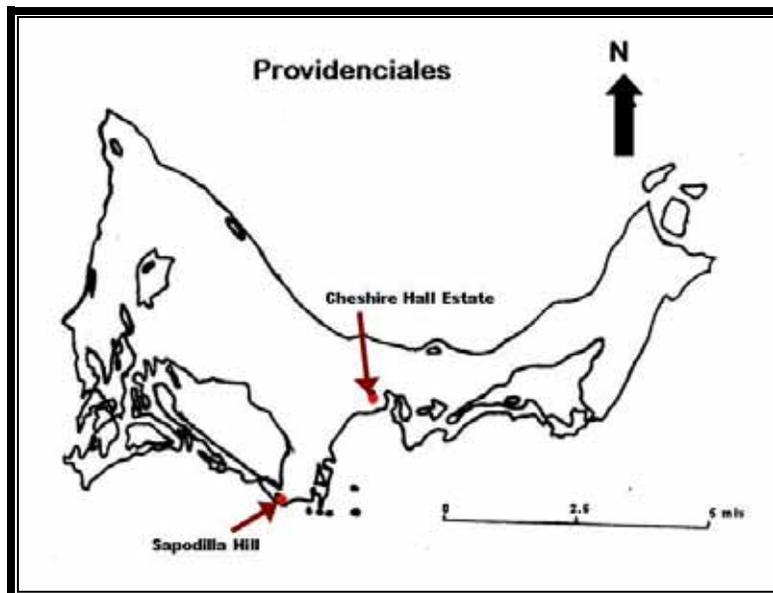


FIGURE 61. Location of graffiti sites on Providenciales Island.



FIGURE 62a. Photo of Sloop O, *Cheshire Hall* main house.

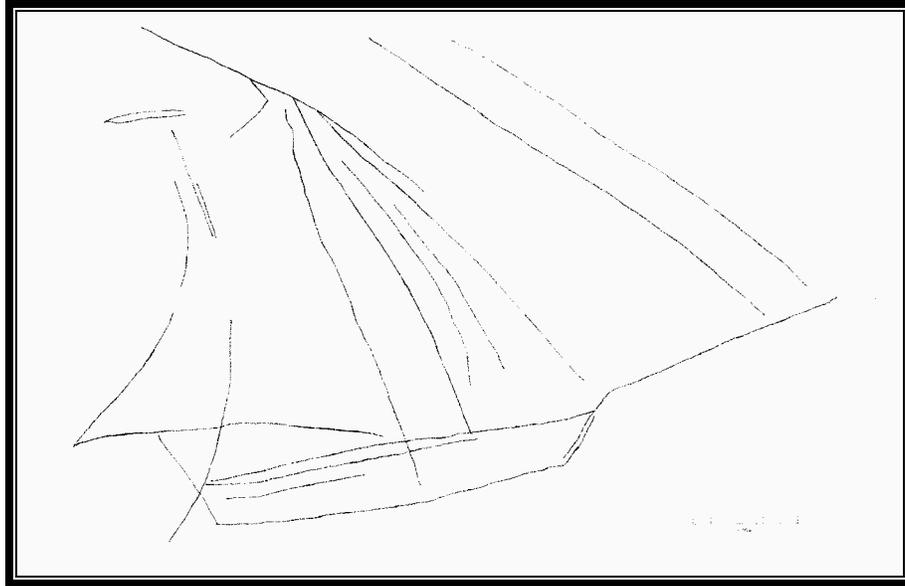


FIGURE 62b. Tracing of Sloop O from *Cheshire Hall* main house porch.

The graffito of Sloop O (Figures 62a and 62b) is located at the back corner of a porch on the south side of the main house. Despite the effects of erosion much of this vessel is still visible.

- It was interpreted as a sloop because it appears to have just one mast which is raked aft. As is commonly seen with these graffiti, the line for the mast extends through the hull.
- The main and fore sails are all gaff rigged.
- At least one jib sail was set on the jib boom.
- Based on the heavily raked mast and sail plan, this vessel could be a Bermuda sloop (Baker 1966:120-121). The heavily raked masts on the ship graffiti in the Turks & Caicos Islands are not as common among graffiti examples from the Bahamas.



FIGURE 63a. Photo of an eroded Schooner U graffito, *Cheshire Hall*.

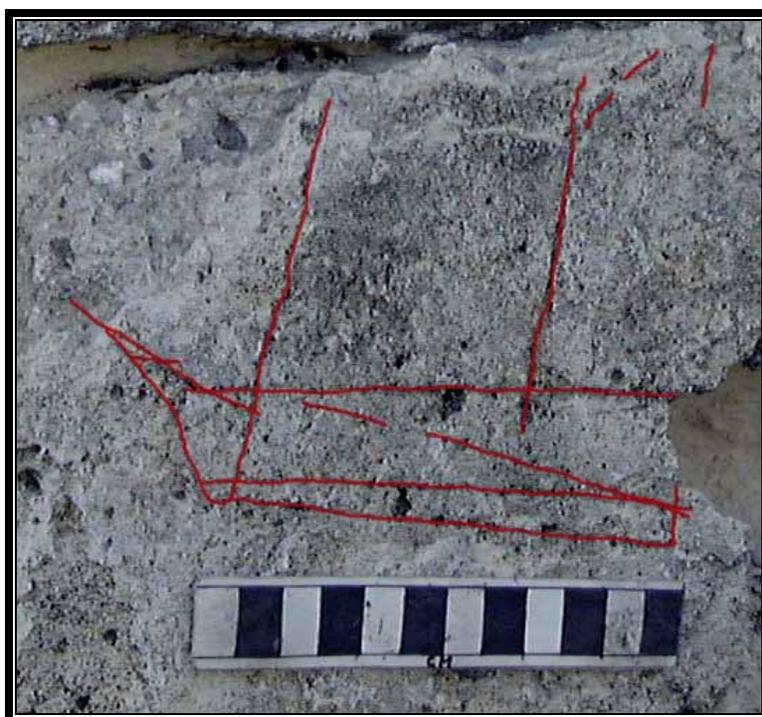


FIGURE 63b. Tracing of Schooner U graffito, *Cheshire Hall*.

Schooner U graffito (Figures 63a and 63b) is also from the porch of the main house and is incised on the wall above the larger graffito of Sloop O (Figure 62, page 142). This graffito is on a more exposed area of the wall so it is far more heavily eroded but the major lines are still distinguishable.

- This is a two-masted ship; only small traces of the head of the main sail are still visible.
- The masts also are characteristically shown extending to the base of the hull/keel.
- The jib boom is still visible at the bow.
- The horizontal line along the hull more likely outlined the keel rather than marking the vessel's water line.

The lines still visible were apparently incised more deeply into the plaster than lines for the sails and any rigging details. This revelation may be further evidence that Bahamian ship graffiti was, at least sometimes, drawn in stages and not necessarily all at once. The extended time for completing the graffiti would further suggest that these ships were being recorded for some more functional purpose than merely passing time.

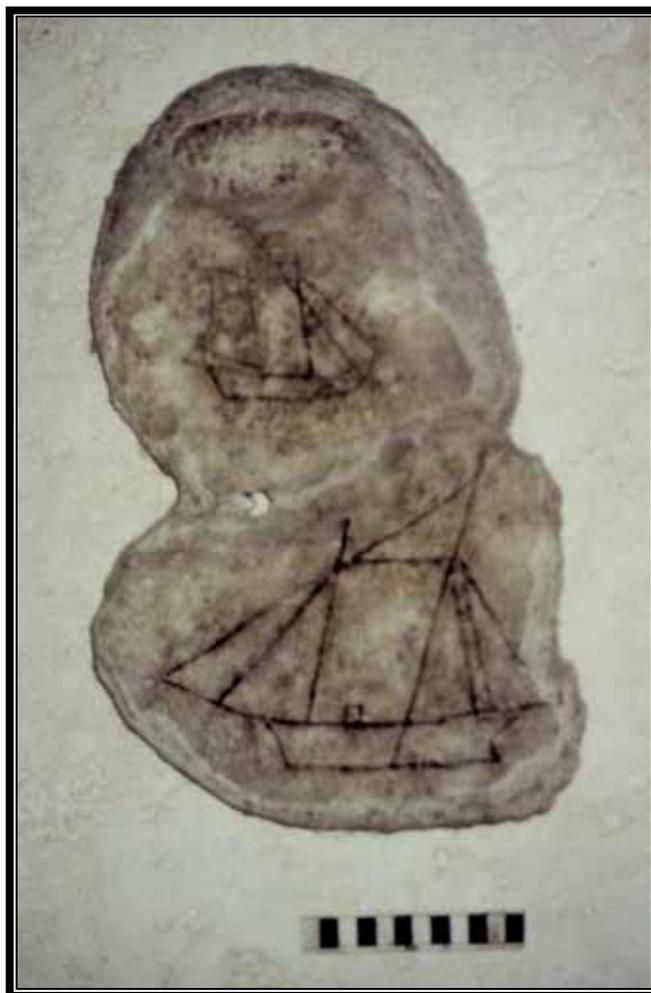
Sapodilla Hill

FIGURE 64. Casts of Sapodilla Hill ship graffiti, Schooner V (top) and Schooner W (below).

The graffiti for Schooners V and W (Figure 64) were executed on flat limestone slabs on the hillside. Judging from the amount and variety of historic graffiti similarly inscribed on stones at the hill's summit, creating graffiti was a popular pastime for visitors and crew members waiting for ships to set sail from the dock below.

Only the casts of these graffiti were available for examination, although it appears that the casts have retained as much detail as was still visible on the originals.

Schooner V:

- Has two masts set with fore and aft sails.
- The diagonal line intersecting the fore mast appears to represent a main mast stay.

Schooner W:

- This is also a two-masted vessel. Both masts are raked aft but the main mast is raked at an unusually acute angle.
- Only some basic rigging details seem to be included on this graffito. These include stays for both masts, a jumper stay between the masts, and the main mast back stays. The double vertical lines aft of the main mast are joined by criss-crossed lines and probably represent the main mast shrouds.
- It is uncertain what the small square between the two masts was intended to represent.

North Caicos

Wade's Green plantation

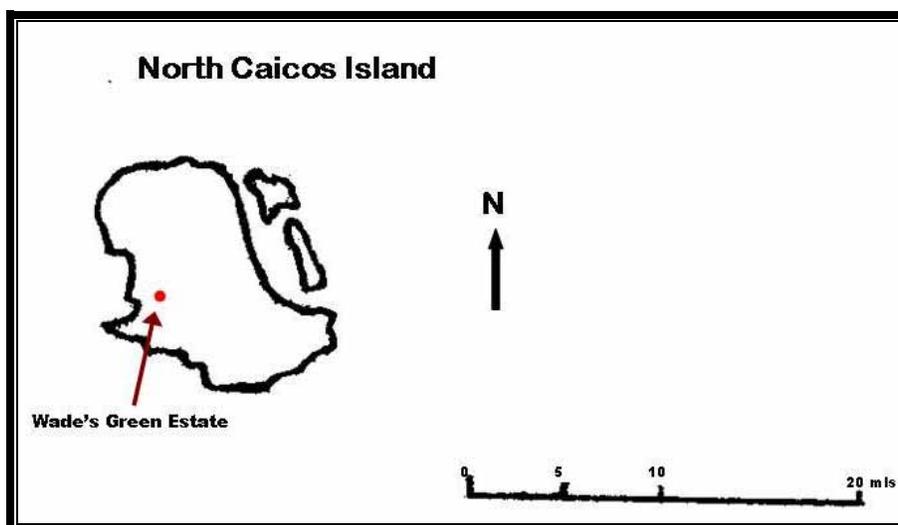


FIGURE 65. Map of North Caicos Island showing location of *Wade's Green* plantation.

On North Caicos Island the only known location of ship graffiti is at *Wade's Green* plantation (Figure 65). Although parts of this site were reused until the early 20th century, the ship graffiti are limited to the kitchen building (Figure 66). This suggests that these were drawn during the plantation period, which ended in the 1830s.

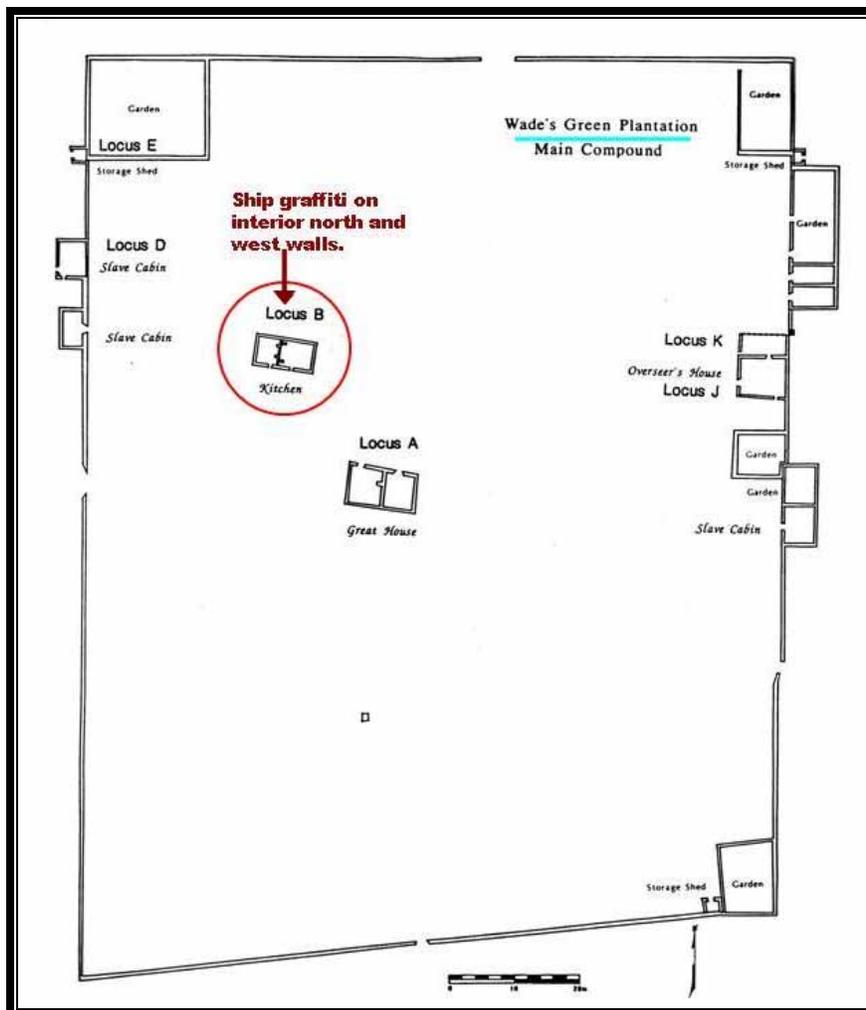


FIGURE 66. Site map of *Wade's Green* plantation showing location of graffiti site.



FIGURE 67a. Photo of ship graffiti at second floor level of kitchen building, *Wade's Green*.

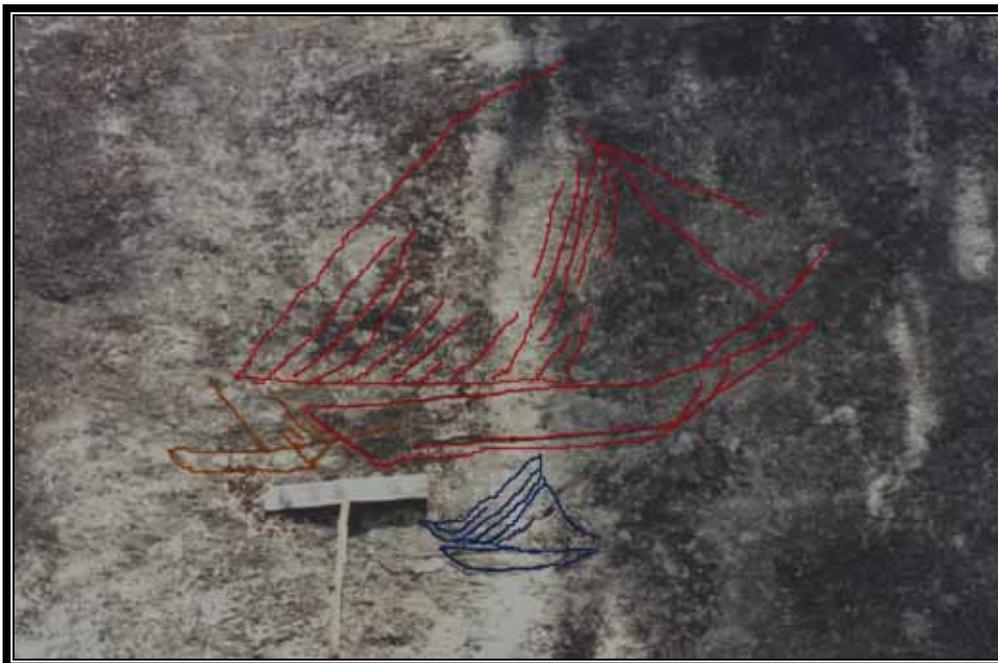


FIGURE 67b. Computer-generated tracing of Sloop P (top), Sloop Q (below), and Schooner X (left).

The ship graffiti shown in Figure 67a and 67b are designated Sloop P (top) and Sloop Q (below). A third hull, immediately left of the large graffiti, Sloop P, is designated Schooner X as it exhibits remnants of sharply raked masts similar to those on Schooner W (Figure 64, page 145). There are faded vestiges of even more ship graffiti in this area of the wall but these are now so eroded it is difficult to clearly distinguish them all.

#### Sloop P:

- A mast is no longer visible on this graffiti but the series of lines denoting sails indicates there is only a gaff main sail. Details of the fore sail do not seem to have ever been included.
- Two, possibly three diagonal lines leading to the jib boom would represent mast stays.
- The diagonal line above the sail would be part of a peak halyard for the gaff.

#### Sloop Q:

- This graffiti is executed in the same style as the larger graffiti of Sloop P. Such similarities could mean that these features represent the style of the same artist.
- The smaller graffiti, Sloop Q, does not include as many details as the larger Sloop P; for example, no peak halyards or mast stays are shown on Sloop Q.

#### Schooner X:

- Very little of this graffiti is still visible. What remains includes the outline of the hull, the base of two masts, and a few lines denoting a sail.
- Lines denoting two extremely raking masts were sufficient to classify this graffiti as a schooner. The raking masts would suggest that the vessel recorded in this graffiti was similar in appearance to Schooner W at Sapodilla Hill.



FIGURE 68a. Photograph of the heavily eroded graffiti of Schooner Y, window jamb of kitchen building.

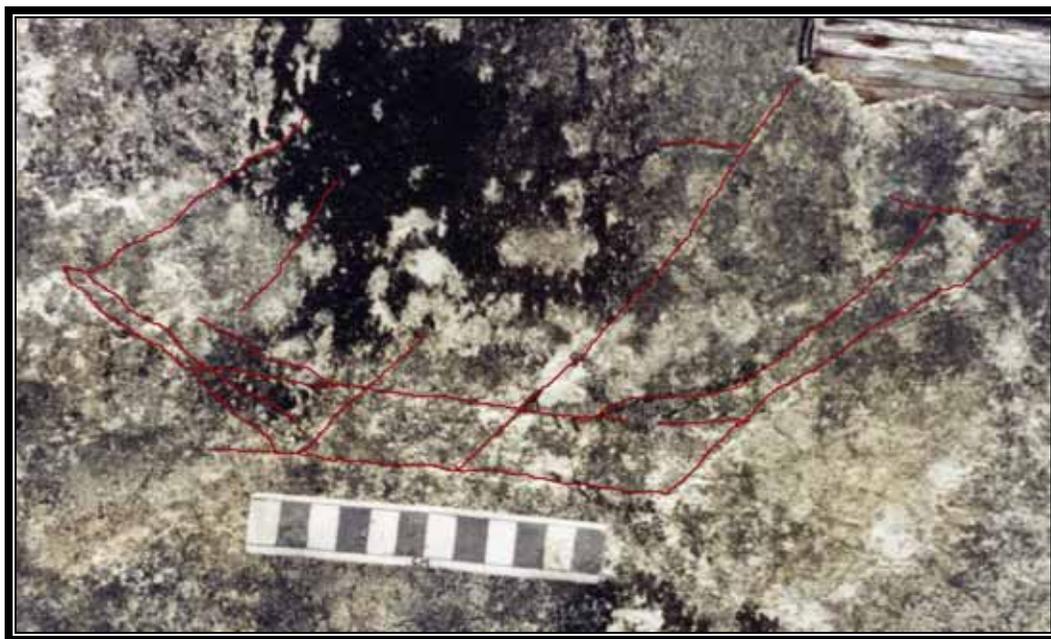


FIGURE 68b. Computer-generated tracing of Schooner Y, *Wade's Green*, North Caicos.

The graffito of Schooner Y (Figures 68a and 68b) is in a window jamb on the ground floor of the kitchen building. Despite the erosion of this graffito, sufficient lines are still visible to distinguish some diagnostic lines.

- Slanted vertical lines passing through the hull indicate that the two masts were raked sharply aft.
- Segments of two diagonal lines on the jib boom represent mast stays.
- Very little detail of any sails is still evident.

The general pattern observed about schooner graffiti from the Turks & Caicos Islands is that all the examples documented were drawn with sharply raked masts. This could be an indicator either of the period they date to, or the location they came from. One characteristic of clipper-built vessels was the raking masts. Clippers date from the late 18th century and were in use to the mid- 19th century although, after the War of 1812 they were used mainly for privateering and smuggling (MacGregor 1997:29-30). Based on this information, it can be assumed that these graffiti probably date to the early 19th century. Further, the vessels recorded were most likely from Bermuda or north eastern American ports since clippers were more commonly American-built vessels (MacGregor 1997:30; Phillips-Birt 1962:142-143).

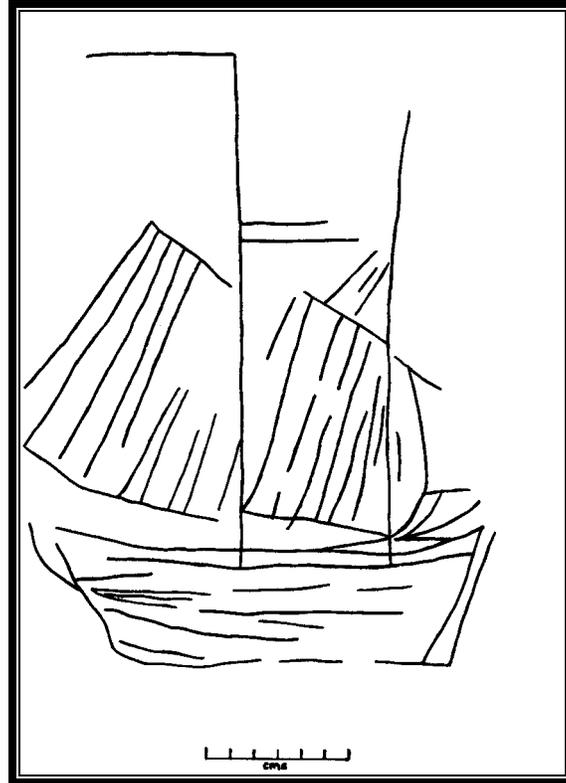


FIGURE 69. Tracing of Schooner Z graffito.

The graffito of Schooner Z (Figure 69) illustrates:

- A two-masted vessel with gaff-rigged main and fore sails in addition to a jib sail.
- The peak halyards on the fore sail gaff are still visible.
- There appears to be double jumper stays between the two masts.
- Only the bottom line of a flag atop the main mast remains.
- The outline of the hull includes an unusual amount of detail. The stem is outlined, while the curve of lines at the stern suggests the shape of the transom and the slope of the vessel's lines to the keel.

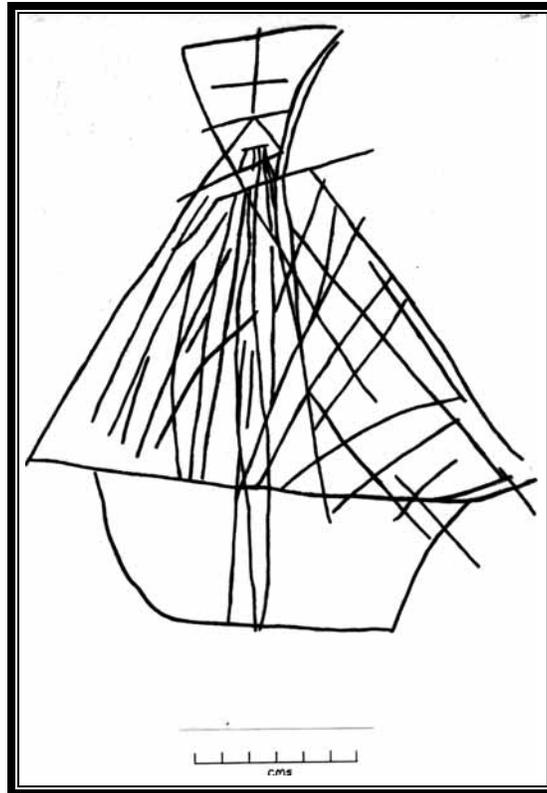


FIGURE 70. Tracing of Sloop R graffiti.

As with the sloop graffiti from the San Salvador jail cell, the lines of this graffiti (Figure 70) seem very simplistic and crudely done. This may not only be a matter of style but an illustration of the artist's greater interest in function rather than form, since the same kind of essentials are included in this graffiti.

- The mast is shown by two lines instead of just one; this implies its thickness.
- The hull seems disproportionately large compared to the sails as both the jib boom and main sail boom only extend a short distance beyond the hull lines.
- No clear photographs of this graffiti were available for further detailed examination away from the site. It is possible that among the confusion of crossed lines, on the main sail especially, is the remnants of an earlier graffiti.

## Crooked Island

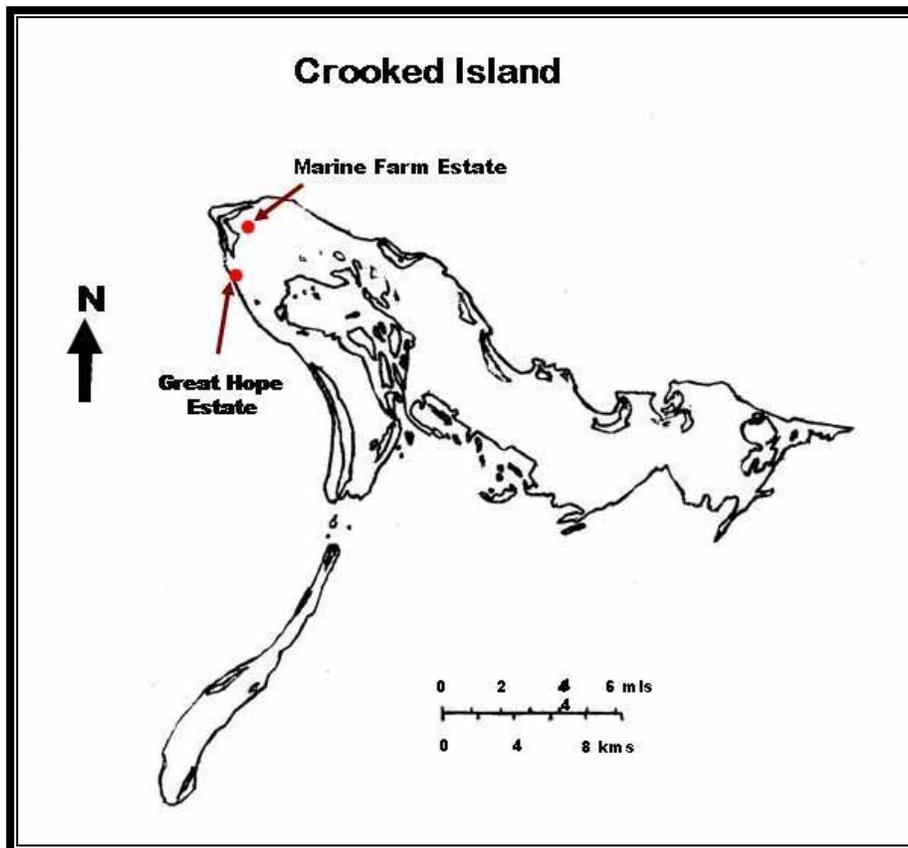


FIGURE 71. Map showing ship graffiti sites on Crooked Island, Bahamas.

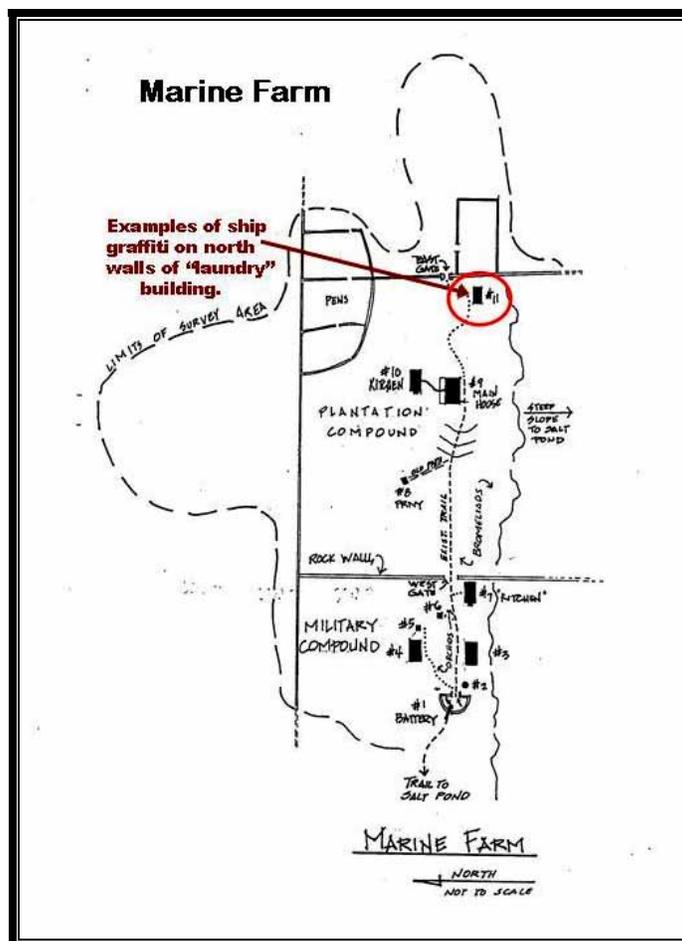


FIGURE 72. Map showing location of graffiti site at *Marine Farm* plantation. (Adapted from Shorter 1996:3).

The ship graffiti at *Marine Farm* on Crooked Island (Figure 71) were, unfortunately, not documented during the fieldwork for this research. Although none of the graffiti at this site (Figure 72) are included in the catalogue, the site is still mentioned as it follows a similar pattern in the location of ship graffiti at other Bahamian plantation sites, such as at *Great Hope* estate on the same island (Figure 73). Inclusion of the site is also important to the overall discussion of Bahamian ship graffiti as it supports the hypothesis that the phenomenon of Bahamian ship graffiti was not merely the result of random, or idle doodling.

## Great Hope Estate

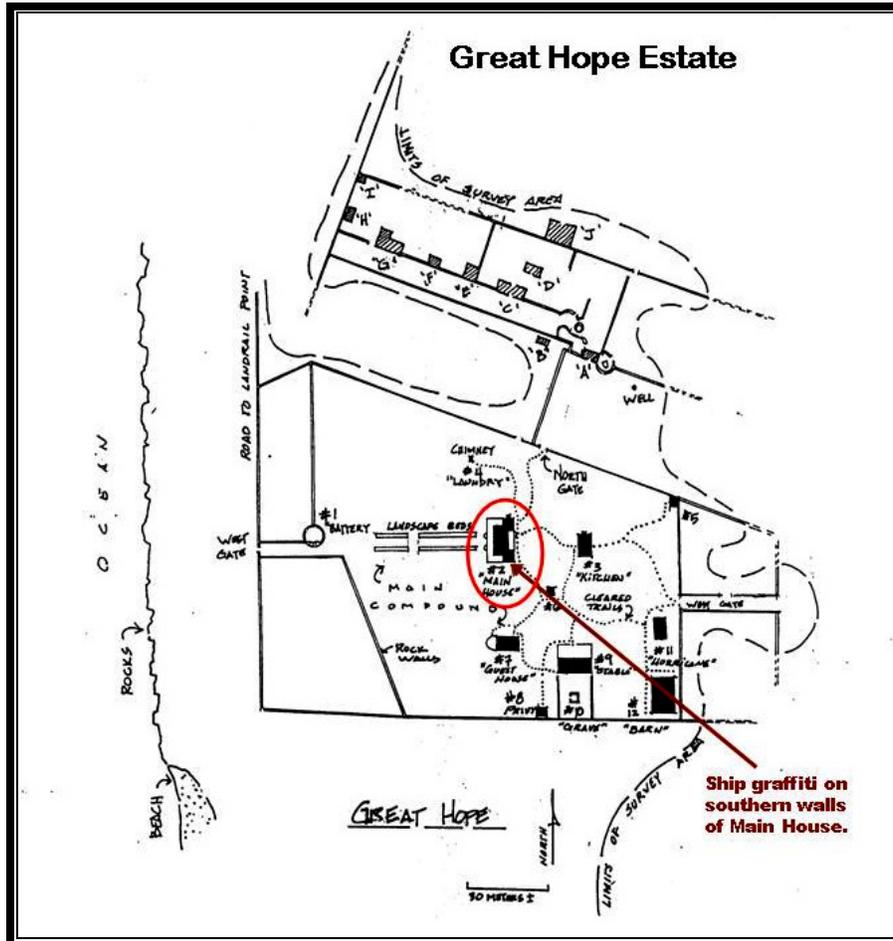


FIGURE 73. Location of ship graffiti at Great Hope Estate, Crooked Island. (Adapted from Shorter 1996:4).



FIGURE 74a. Ship graffiti from the second floor of the *Great Hope* main house.



FIGURE 74b. Tracings of ship graffiti on main house at *Great Hope* plantation.

This montage of ship graffiti (Figures 74a and 74b) comprises the largest cluster of ship images from the *Great Hope* estate's main house. These are at the second floor level and presumably were incised by someone sitting or kneeling on the floor of the top storey verandah. Included in this group are two schooners, Schooner AA graffiti, traced in green, is top left and Schooner BB, traced in red, is top center. Below Schooner BB are the identifiable remains of at least four sloops; Sloop S, traced in purple, Sloop T, traced in light blue, Sloop U, traced in orange, and Sloop V, traced in lavender. At the bottom of the photo, traced in tan, is Brig A. Although a similar montage of ship graffiti was documented at *Prospect Hill* plantation (Figures 50a and 50b, page 126) on San Salvador Island the variety of vessel types is decidedly different in this group. The only other site where these types of ocean-going ships were recorded in this research was at the old gaol building in Nassau, the colony's major harbor.

#### Schooner AA:

- Appears to be a three-masted vessel; fore mast, main mast, and mizzen mast.
- None of the sail outlines seem to be visible.
- The fore and main masts each have a yard arm, indicating the presence of top sails. Top sail schooners were generally larger ships intended for ocean voyages (MacGregor 1997:34).

#### Schooner BB:

- This vessel has two masts with fore and aft sails.
- The fore mast has a yard arm for a top sail so this is also a top sail schooner.

- Rigging details on this graffito includes the fore and main mast shrouds.

#### Sloops S through V:

- All that remains of Sloop S is the mast, its gaff-rigged main sail, and the after section of the hull.
- The outlines of Sloops T and U show fore stays attached to a jib boom with triangular, leg-o-mutton main sails (Johnson 2000:4).
- Only the lower, after portion of Sloop V graffito remains but, based on its shape, it originally depicted a vessel similar to Sloops T and U.
- All of the sloops probably represented locally-built vessels. Johnson (2000:22) noted that gaff-rigged smack boats, such as Sloop S, were especially adapted for sea and wind conditions encountered in sailing between the islands. The last of these boats were in use in the southern Bahamas until the early 1960s. Sloops T and U have long jib booms unlike the early 20th century examples recorded from the old San Salvador jail.

#### Barque, or bark A:

- This vessel has square-rigged main and fore masts. Only the base of the mizzen mast is still visible.
- A few lines of the gaff sail on the mizzen remain. Several diagonal lines at the bow also indicate the jib sails set on the jib boom.

A barque was a three-masted vessel rigged with square sails on the fore and main masts and a gaff sail on the mizzen mast (Gardiner 1993:10). These were definitely

large, ocean-going vessels not traditionally built in the Bahamas. It is not coincidental that graffiti portraying this type vessel are only found close to a major shipping route through the Bahama Islands.

The west coast of Crooked Island borders on the Crooked Island Passage which is one of just three major channels that traverse the archipelago. Historically the Crooked Island Passage was used by ships entering or leaving the Caribbean Sea via the Windward Passage between Cuba and Haiti. One important difference between this montage of ship graffiti and those recorded from most other sites is that this group includes large, ocean-going ships passing through the Bahamas, the exception being the old gaol site near Nassau's harbor. Since Nassau was traditionally the commercial hub of the archipelago this would explain the variety of ship types recorded there. So an analysis of the types of vessels recorded at each site also provides some insight on the nature of shipping traffic for each area.



FIGURE 75a Photo of Schooner CC graffiti, second floor, *Great Hope* plantation main house.

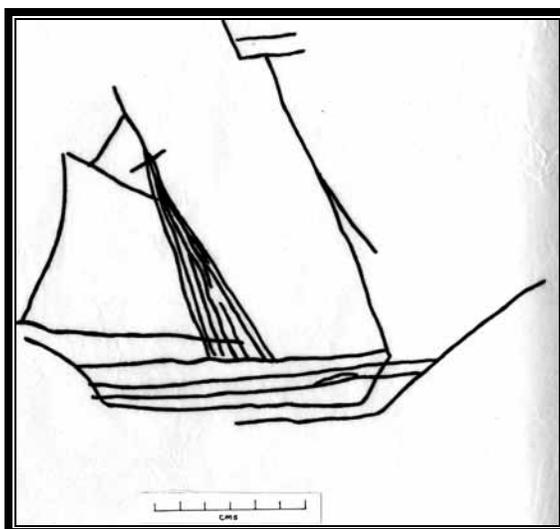


FIGURE 75b. Tracing of Schooner CC graffiti, *Great Hope* plantation.

Schooner CC graffiti (Figures 75a and 75b) was recorded from another wall of the second storey verandah.

- It depicts a two-masted vessel with sharply raked masts.
- The only sail still visible is the gaff main sail. Also shown is the peak halyard for the gaff yard arm.
- Details of this graffiti include the main mast shrouds, and plank lines on the hull.

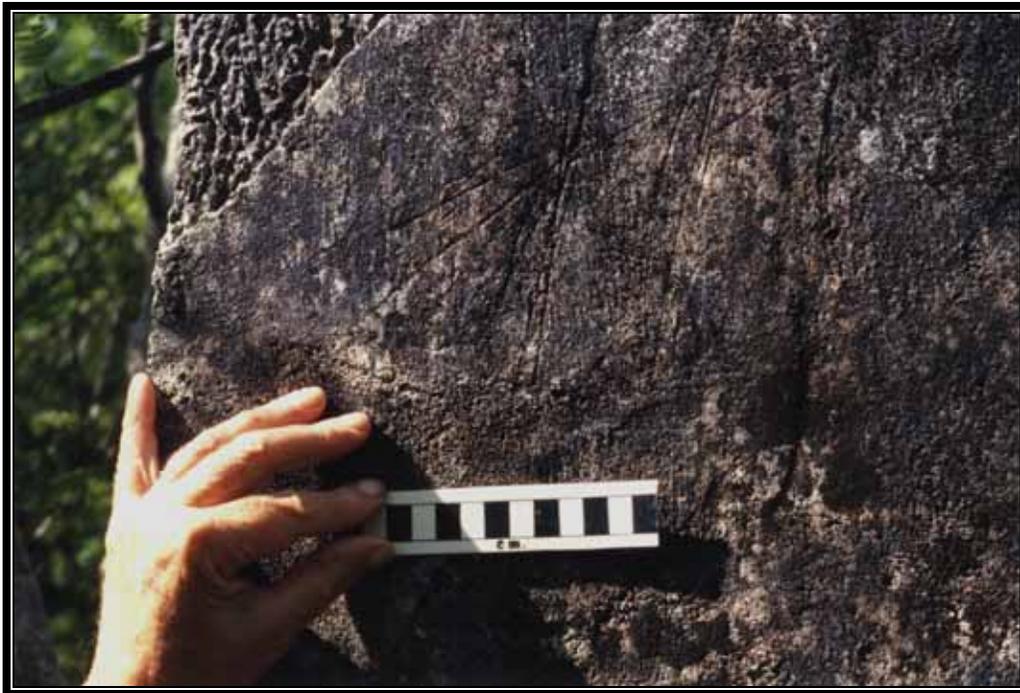


FIGURE 76a. Photo of Schooner DD graffito, first floor of *Great Hope* main house. (N.B. – Scale held in place courtesy of June MacMillan, Crooked Island).

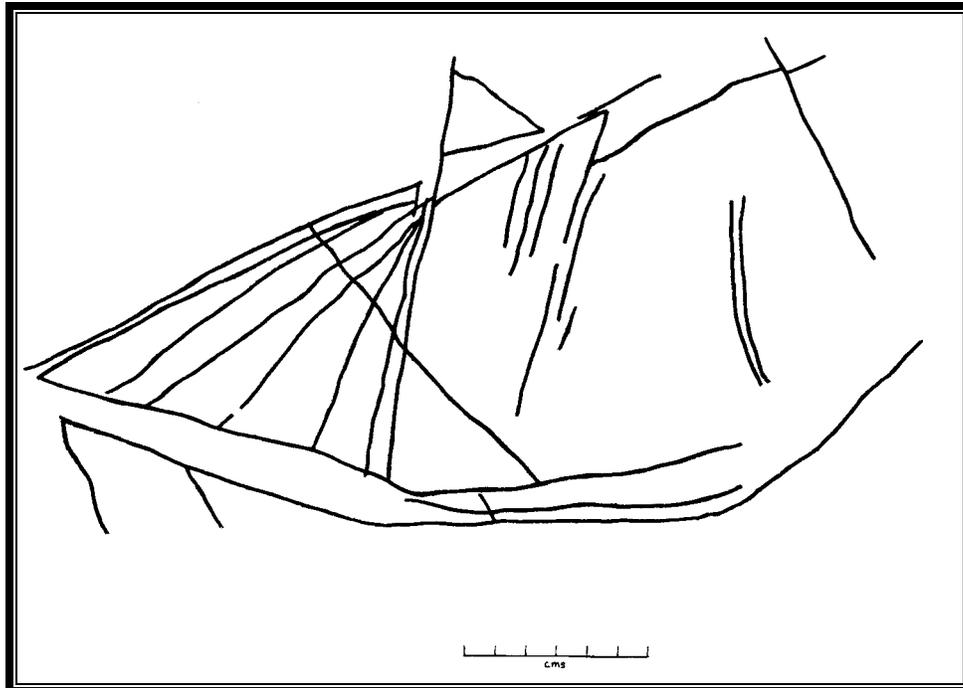


FIGURE 76b. Tracing of Schooner DD graffito from the *Great Hope* main house.

The graffiti of Schooner DD (Figures 76a and 76b) was recorded from an interior wall of a small room at the back of the main house. This room is on the lower level of the house but on the same side as the verandah; facing the ocean. A number of ship graffiti are on the walls along the southern side of the room; however, most of these are heavily obscured by microbial growth on the lime plaster surface. The extensive lichen cover makes it extremely difficult to distinguish the lines for each graffiti. Schooner DD graffiti is the clearest and most complete example of ship drawings in this room.

- It is a two-masted schooner with gaff main and fore sails, plus jib sails.
- The diagonal line between the fore stay and the foot of the fore sail probably represents a sheet for stabilizing the flying jib sail.
- Heavy microbial growth on the lime plaster surface has covered all except a few details of this vessel's hull. Apart from the gunwale, only two vertical lines give a partial outline of the bow.

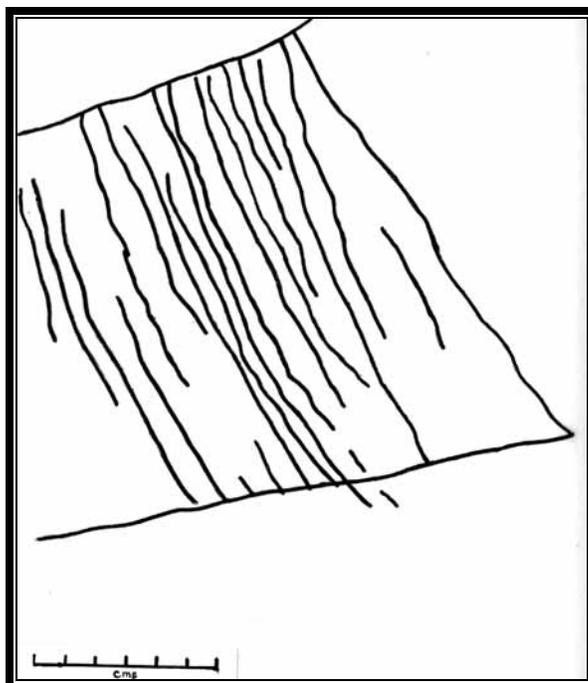


FIGURE 77. Tracing of a fore and aft sail, *Great Hope* estate.

The image of a single gaff sail (Figure 77) was recorded from another wall in the ground floor room.

- The surrounding wall surface had no deliberately incised lines so it is unlikely that part of the graffiti eroded and this section is all that remains.
- This incomplete ship graffiti was included because of the insight it provides on the process of creating Bahamian ship graffiti. As in the case of just an incised hull from *Tusculum* plantation (Figure 15, page 71) on New Providence, the occurrence of the lone sail suggests that Bahamian ship graffiti were not necessarily completed in a single recording session. Such a timeline would suggest that recording Bahamian ship graffiti required not only a suitable location but the required the available time to execute the image as well.

## The Abacos

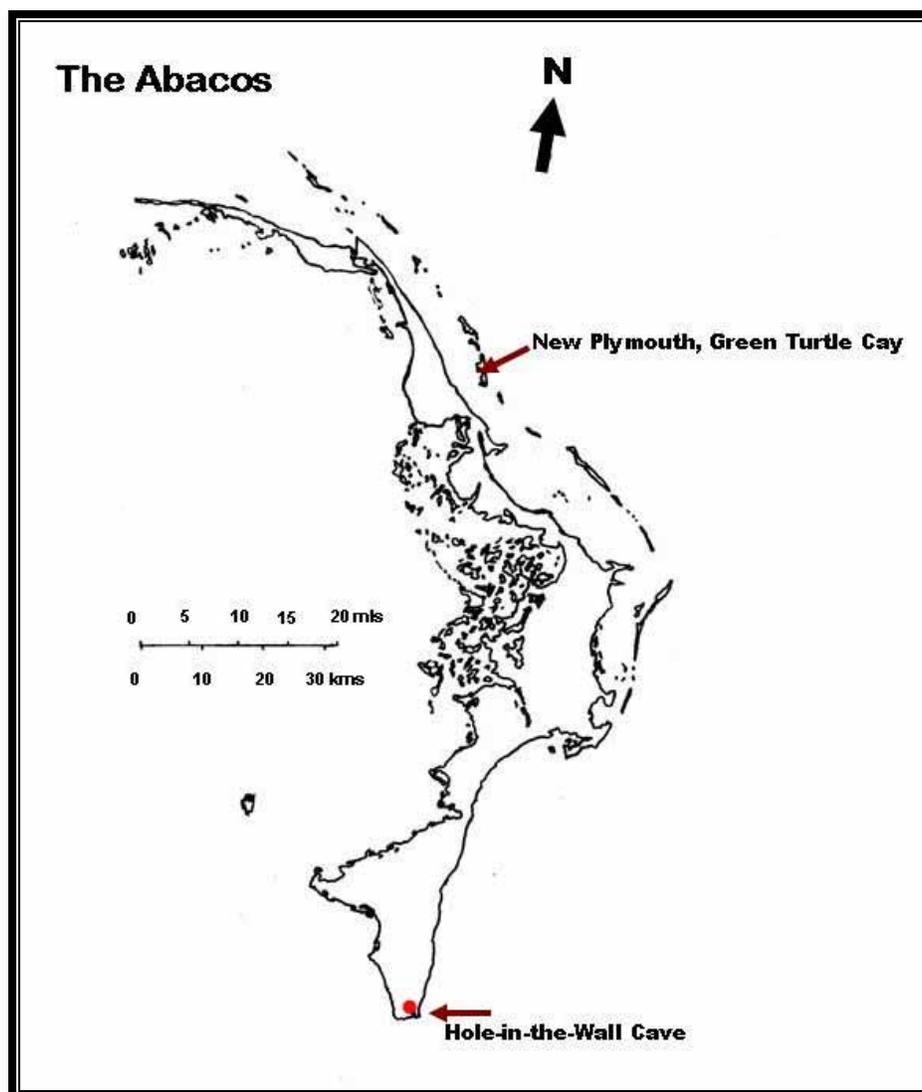


FIGURE 78. Map of the Abacos showing locations of ship graffiti sites.

The location of the Abacos (Figure 78) in the northern Bahamas near the major sailing route out of the Caribbean has meant that seafaring has always been important for the inhabitants. Settlements were established on outlying cays, such as Green Turtle Cay (Figure 79), since the late 17th century.

## New Plymouth, Green Turtle Cay

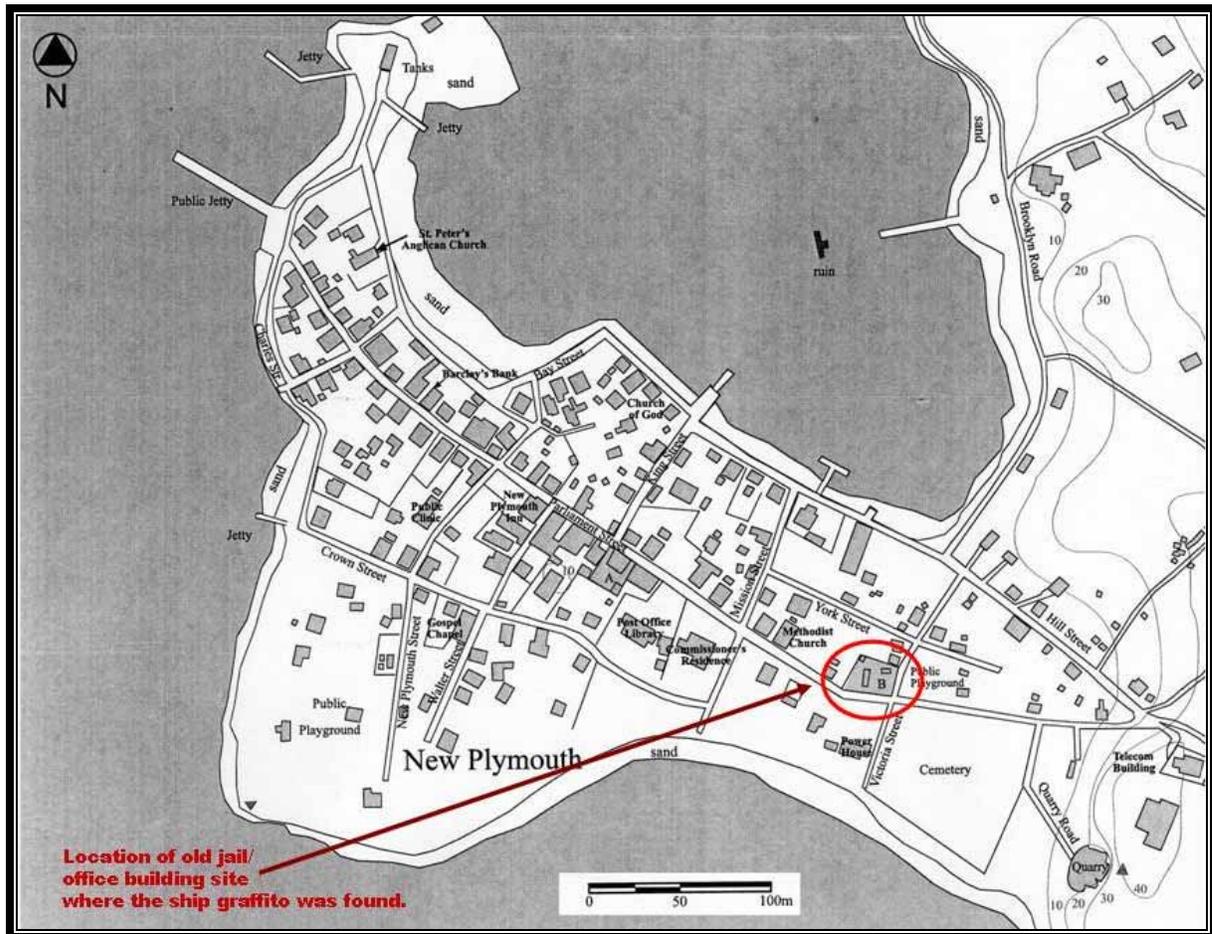


FIGURE 79. Map of New Plymouth, Green Turtle Cay, Abaco, showing location of ship graffiti site. (Adapted from Lance & Carr 2003:4).

## Old Jail Site

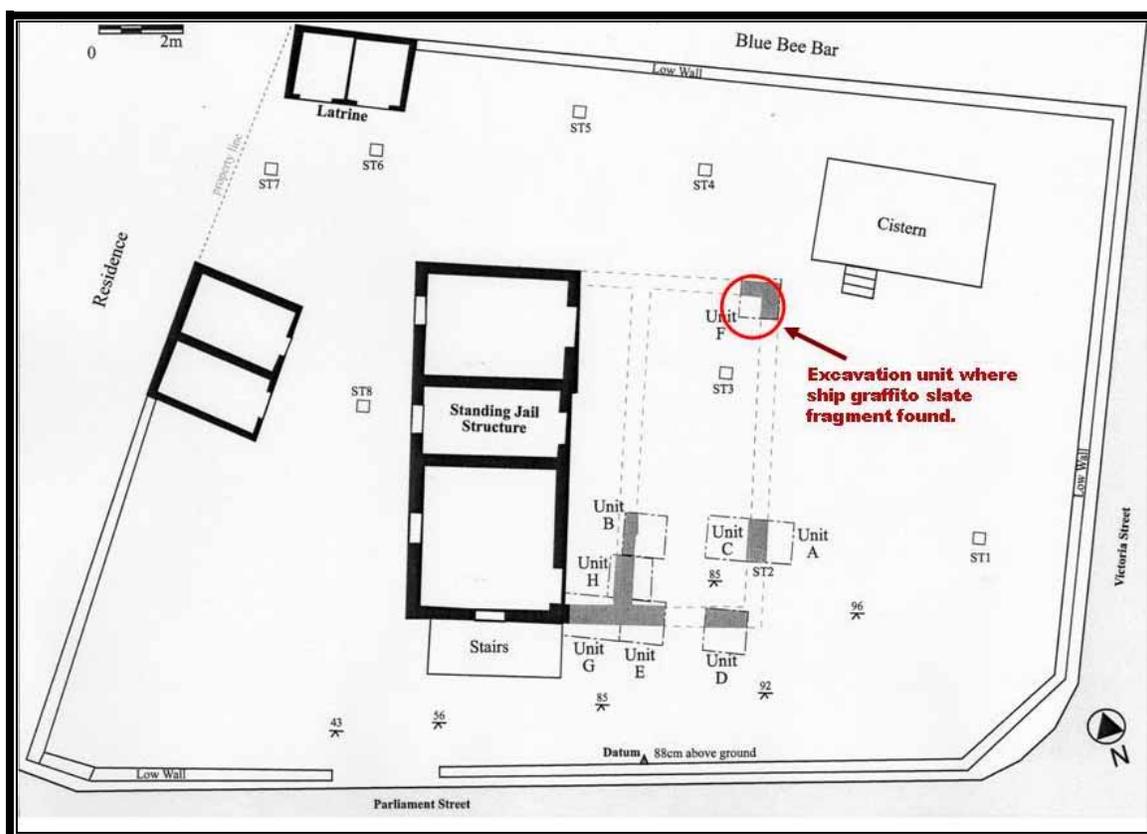


FIGURE 80. Site map showing area where slate fragment with ship graffito was excavated. (Adapted from Lance & Carr 2003:10)

Although Green Turtle Cay was inhabited since the late 1600s, the settlement of New Plymouth only dates to the late 1700s with the arrival of Loyalist refugees from the American colonies. Only a single ship graffito was documented from this tiny island. The plantation site (Figure 80) is no longer recognizable as such but finding an example of a portable ship graffito illustrates the range of surfaces Bahamian ship graffiti were recorded on.



FIGURE 81a. Photo of Sloop W graffito on slate fragment. (Lance & Carr 2003:18)

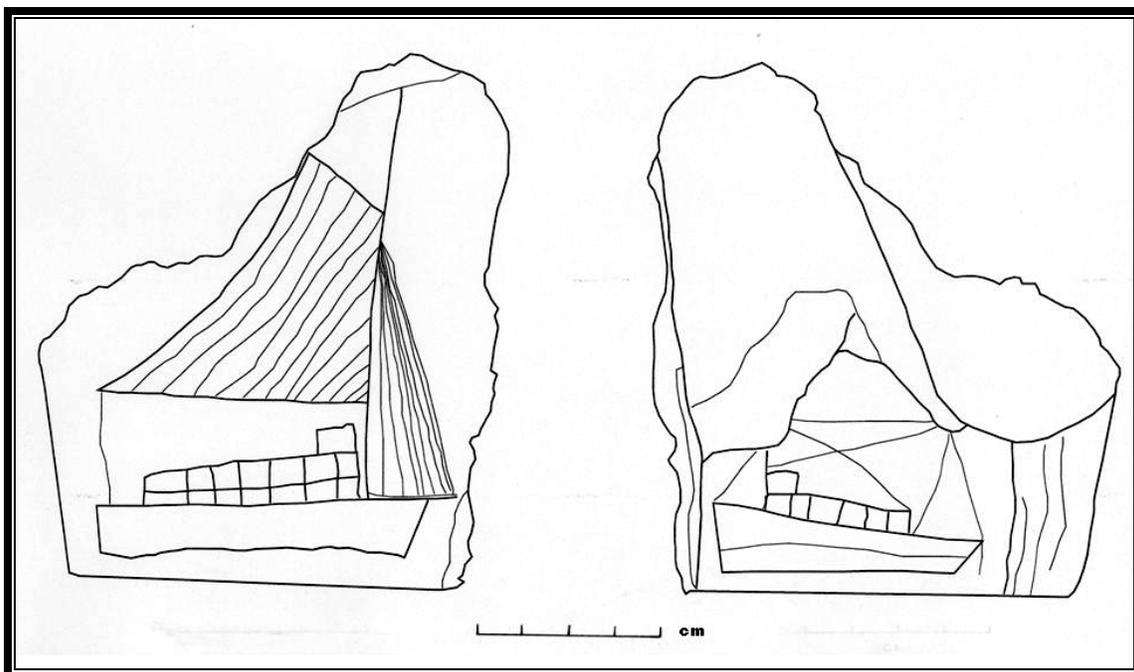


FIGURE 81b. Tracings of Sloop W on front face (left) and reverse side (right) of slate fragment. (Lance & Carr 2003:19).

The slate fragment on which Sloop W graffito (Figures 81a and 81b) is incised was excavated from a layer of mid-19th century construction rubble (Lance & Carr 2003:17). A government office/jail, similar to the one on San Salvador, was built about 1910 over part of the foundation of a 19th century plantation's main house. This graffito seems unusual because it was created in a portable format; however, within the context of this research it further demonstrates the range of locations used to record Bahamian ship graffiti.

Sloop W:

- Has a gaff-rigged main sail.
- The vertical line from the main sail boom to the deck apparently represents the sheet to stabilize the main sail boom.
- The fore sail, like graffiti of Sloops J, M and N from the San Salvador jail, is rigged to a very short jib boom. This may be evidence for dating the transition to shorter jib booms, or no jib boom on locally-built sloops.
- The cluster of small rectangles on the deck may represent either cargo or deck structures such as the main cabin and cook box (Johnson 2000:1).

Hole-in-the-Wall Cave



FIGURE 82a. Photo of Ketch A graffiti on a rock face in a cave at Hole-in-the-Wall, Abaco.

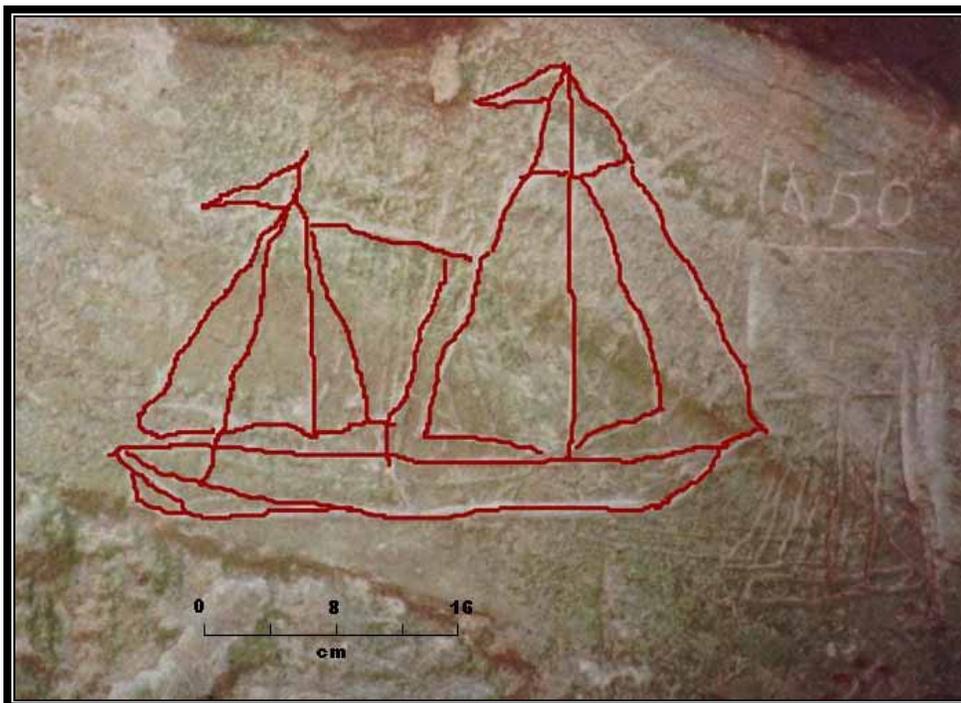


FIGURE 82b. Computer-generated tracing of Ketch A graffiti.

The graffito of Ketch A (Figures 82a and 82b) is the largest of at least four ships carved into a rock inside the Hole-in-the-Wall cave. It is the only example of a ketch documented for this research. This graffito exhibits all the standard features of the ketch rig:

- For the ketch rig there was no fore mast; instead the taller, forward mast was the main mast so the shorter mast aft of the main mast served as the mizzen mast (Biddlecombe 1925:109-110; Gardiner 1993:15).
- Both masts are rigged with fore and aft sails. The main mast also has gaff top sails; the mizzen mast was not always rigged with top sails (Biddlecombe 1925:109).
- As was common on a ketch-rigged vessel, the boom on the after mast does not extend beyond the stern as with a schooner (Gardiner 1993:15).
- Other rigging details include a jumper stay between the masts and the mast stay to the jib boom.
- The curved line in the after end of this vessel's hull appears to represent the deadwood assembly between the sternpost and keel.
- The small appendage aft of the stern may represent the rudder.



FIGURE 83a. Photo of Schooner EE graffito, Hole-in-the-Wall cave, Abaco.

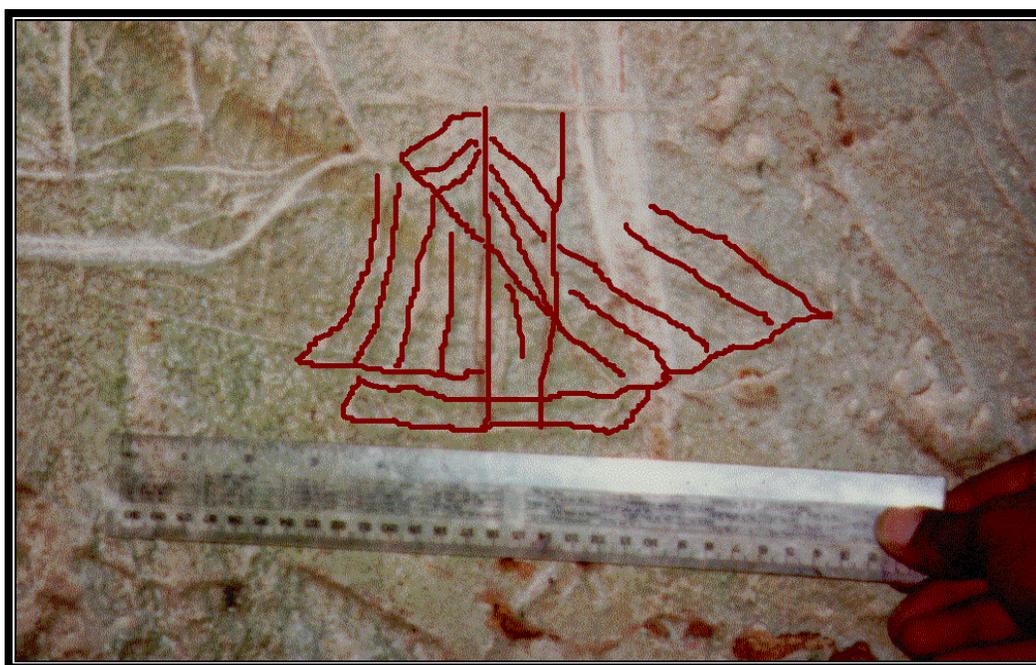


FIGURE 83b. Tracing of Schooner EE graffito.

The graffito of Schooner EE (Figures 83a and 83b) is at the lower right corner of the graffito of Ketch A on the same boulder.

- It has two masts which both extend to the base of the hull, which is presumed to represent the keel.
- The gaff-rigged main sail is clearly shown. The three diagonal lines above the gaff yard represent the peak halyards.
- The fore sail is not as clearly distinguishable, but the three topmost diagonal lines between the two masts seem to represent rigging details.
- At least four diagonal lines lead to the jib boom and would represent mast stays on which jib sails were rigged.
- Only the outline of the hull is shown in this graffito. The more uneven surface of the boulder probably limited the amount of detail this artist felt could be safely included.

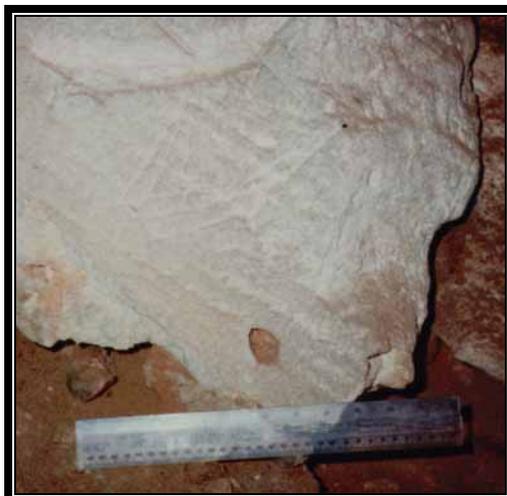


FIGURE 84a. Photo of Sloop X graffiti, Hole-in-the-Wall cave.

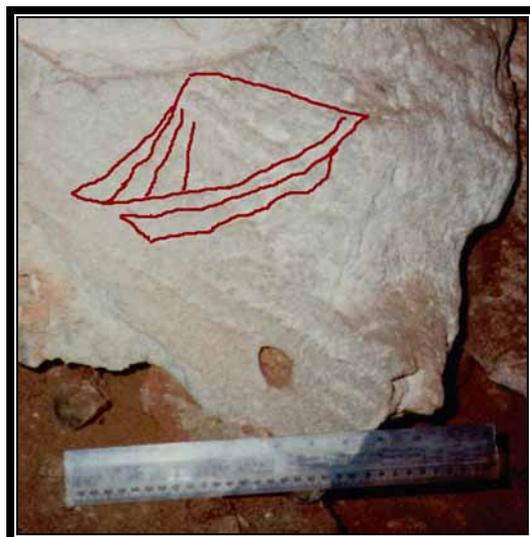


FIGURE 84b. Tracing of Sloop X graffiti.

The graffiti of Sloop X (Figures 84a and 84b) is near the lower right corner of the boulder. It is also one of the most eroded examples recorded at this site.

- As with the other ship graffiti carved into this boulder, only the outline of the hull and sails are visible on this vessel.
- This sloop has the longer jib boom that is presumed to represent earlier examples of locally-built sloops.

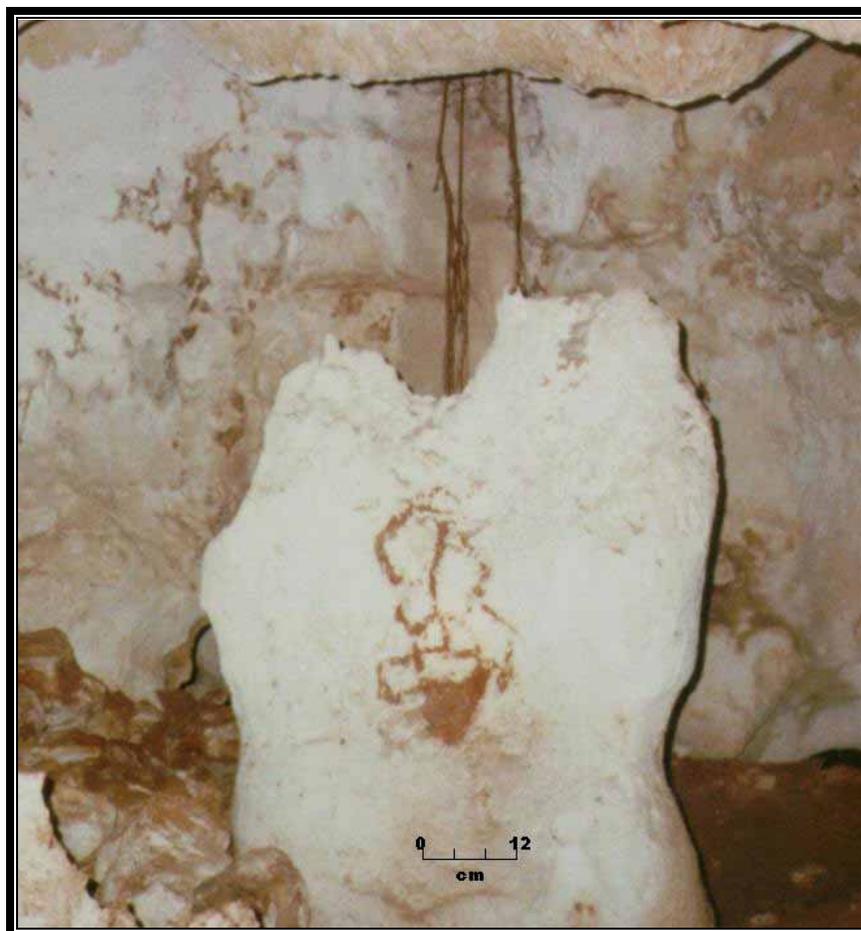


FIGURE 85. Photo of a ship graffito made with *guano*, Hole-in-the-Wall cave, Abaco.

The graffito of the Guano Ship (Figure 85) is the only example on another rock face deeper into the cave.

- This ship graffito was not only executed by a different method but it also depicts the vessel from a different perspective
- Instead of presenting a side view of the vessel, this graffito shows a frontal perspective looking at the ship from the bow.
- This is indeed another type of ship graffito because two standard features, as the means of execution and the visual perspective, are different from all other examples recorded. Based on this information it is presumed that this ship

graffito was made during a different time period and therefore by a different population.

- The only other ship graffito similar to this example is the ship from the Taino mural inside a cave in the Dominican Republic (Figure 5, page 39). That example was also created using bat guano. Even more striking is the fact that the Taino ship graffito also shows the same perspective of the vessel being recorded. In light of this information, the Guano Ship graffito is being interpreted as a Lucayan creation and therefore dates as the earliest example of Bahamian ship graffiti. As noted earlier, Lucayans were a sub-cultural group of the Taino who lived on Hispaniola and Cuba. This example, therefore, extends the concept of shipping in the Bahamas far beyond the later historical period.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

This research to record and document Bahamian ship graffiti was undertaken in an effort to understand more about this cultural phenomenon before more of the examples were destroyed or eroded into oblivion. The implications of these research findings extend far beyond the limits of the tiny Bahama Islands. The principles of interpreting Bahamian ship graffiti can be applied to material culture from any place or time period.

In the archaeological literature the value of studying nautical iconography such as ship graffiti has been limited to the analysis of technical details. Of the varied forms of ship iconography, ship graffiti are the least reliable in providing information on ship construction. The amount of detail an artist is able to clearly depict in a single graffito is limited in this recording method. Further, it is impossible to fully understand the artists' intent on why certain details were included while others were omitted. For this reason nautical archaeologists have been extremely cautious in even considering ship graffiti as a viable archaeological resource. While this is indeed a legitimate concern, it should nevertheless not restrict the analysis of ship graffiti from other perspectives.

Technical details were noted for the ship graffiti catalogued for this research. That information, however, was included more as an indicator of the artists' level of knowledge about ship construction and rigging than as a measure of technical accuracy. A more fruitful use for the analysis of these examples of Bahamian ship graffiti would be to view them as cultural indicators denoting the level of significance of shipping among these islands. This, in fact, should hold true for ship graffiti from any locale. While technical details evident within ship graffiti may lack sufficient accuracy to definitively

trace the development of ship construction techniques, the depiction of construction and rigging details can be interpreted as evidence of the artists' knowledge of ships. From this point of view the scaled and proportional accuracy of construction and rigging details are secondary to whatever message the artist intended to portray in creating ship graffiti. Therefore the greater significance of ship graffiti would be their expression of some cultural phenomenon rather than as highly accurate models of ship technology.

In the case of Bahamian ship graffiti, this research has demonstrated that the tradition of creating ship graffiti lasted at least 100 years. This conclusion was based on the age range of structures where ship graffiti were documented. It was noted that this tradition likely dates to the 18th century, even possibly as early as the late 17th century, but these would have been recorded on surfaces which have not survived intact within the archaeological record. The selection of existing ship graffiti has survived largely because of the more durable surfaces these examples were recorded on. Yet many of these are already heavily eroded and could soon disappear altogether.

In the Bahamas the tradition of creating ship graffiti continued into the early 20th century. Although this cultural phenomenon was closely related to the use of sailing vessels among the islands, it was evidently not synonymous with the Age of Sail within the Bahamas. William Johnson noted the use of locally-built sailing vessels as late as the 1960s. No Bahamian ship graffiti documented appear to date later than the 1930s, possibly 1940s. Apparently whatever activity was intended to be recorded by creating ship graffiti, this tradition had faded into oblivion some time before these traditional vessels were themselves finally discarded. One such localized maritime activity would be the practice of wrecking which, despite the construction of eleven lighthouses among

the islands, continued into the 20th century. The latest incident documented for this research occurred in the 1940s. Only the advent of motorized vessels rendered this long-standing Bahamian tradition unfeasible, and it soon became obsolete.

A second factor used to estimate the age of Bahamian ship graffiti was the rigging and spar plans of the vessels depicted. Depictions of schooners with sharply raked masts were assumed to date prior to the 1850s. Based on the historical development of schooners, heavily raked masts was a popular feature for the first third of the 19th century. The purpose was to enhance a vessel's speed. By the 1840s and 1850s innovations such as steam propulsion and the use of many small sails made raking masts obsolete.

At the old Nassau gaol site this chronological range of rigging plans helped to demonstrate the use of the cellar jail cell exclusively for poor Blacks until the prison was relocated in the 1870s. Even though several of the plantation sites, such as *Clifton*, *Sandy Point*, and *Wade's Green*, were reoccupied later in the 19th century and into the 20th century, none of these sites have any examples of ship graffiti which can be dated to the later occupation period. Being able to establish a time frame for examples of ship graffiti is important in understanding during what time period the images were created. The majority of ship graffiti documented date to the first half of the 19th century. All of the examples from plantation sites appear to date to the plantation period which would have ended with the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in the 1830s. Emancipation, however, only affected the relocation of most former slaves; whatever activity motivated the creation of Bahamian ship graffiti continued unabated. Fewer examples of ship graffiti survive from the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, most likely

because many of the surfaces these were recorded on have a poor survival rate in the archaeological record of tropical sites.

Comparison of rigging plans depicted in this selection of ship graffiti with those illustrated in publications pointed to possible delineations between local and regional vessels. Sites such as *Great Hope* and Nassau's old jail recorded a variety of small, local vessels alongside larger, ocean-going ships not seen at any other sites. The heavily raking masts on ship graffiti at sites in the Turks & Caicos Islands may suggest these were predominantly Bermudian sailing craft.

A careful examination of these ship graffiti suggests how they were created. Some of these vessels were apparently recorded in phases. At both the *Tusculum* and *Great Hope* plantation main houses there are examples of incomplete ship graffiti. This insight demonstrates that these vessels were not being recorded from a line of sight but were instead recorded from memory. It is also evident that the artists did not create these images totally in free form. Apart from the tool used to incise lines into the plaster, Bahamian ship graffiti artists also often used a straight edge to show the keel, represented by the bottom of the vessel's hull, as the base line of any graffiti. Additionally, curved edges were often used to get the turn of the stem post at the bow, and sometimes to also capture the after edge of a gaff sail, or even the vessel's water line. Such attention to detail suggests that Bahamian ship graffiti were not hastily or casually executed but were carefully planned.

The most extensive use of tools for creating ship graffiti is seen in the examples from the Nassau jail cell. All of these ships appear to have been drawn using a very sharp, fine-pointed tool which made very thin lines in the plaster. Possibilities for such a

tool include knives, or even a sharpened fragment of glass, something available and readily accessible even to slaves.

An assessment of the various locations where ship graffiti were documented in the Bahamas suggests a very high correlation of this cultural phenomenon with Bahamians of predominantly African heritage. The presence of ship graffiti at several sites not associated with any specific ethnic group implies that instead of being a cultural phenomenon practiced exclusively by Blacks, the creation of Bahamian ship graffiti was actually a tradition among Bahamians of lower socio-economic status. Since Blacks were predominantly represented in this category they would also be the majority of practitioners engaged in any activity limited to this social class.

Another related factor is the possibility that Bahamian ship graffiti artists were only literate in visual recording methods and not the use of words. Clusters of ship graffiti at sites, such as *Great Hope*, *Sandy Point*, and *Prospect Hill*, where images of vessels sometimes overlap, suggest that these images were intended as a continuous recording system. The only known example of a Bahamian plantation journal records the salvage and assistance granted to a passing brig and a local sloop. These journal entries state the vessel type and what aid was rendered. While the ship graffiti images provide an excellent record of the range of vessels plying Bahamian waters, it is impossible to fully understand the purpose for them being recorded in this manner.

One graffito, the Guano Ship, from the cave at Hole-in-the-Wall, Abaco is unique among examples of Bahamian ship graffiti in two important aspects. It was painted onto the stone surface with a guano paste and not incised into the stone as all other examples were. It presents a view of the ship from the front end instead of showing the vessel's

full side profile. These key differences imply that this ship graffiti was created by a different population, literally from a different perspective, and almost certainly for a different reason. The presence of this graffiti in the catalogue of Bahamian ship graffiti illustrates the fact that creating ship graffiti is a tradition not limited, by time or space, to any particular social or ethnic group.

In fact, this examination of Bahamian ship graffiti serves as a case study for the hypothesis that the creation of ship graffiti is a cultural phenomenon which reflects the relative significance of ships and shipping in the economy of the artists' society. The regular incidence of ship graffiti in the Bahamas is an indication that the cultural intentions for these images were much more than mere doodlings by idle hands and minds. Interpreting the technical details is often a challenge, but this should be considered as only one aspect of a larger view of these images as material culture. Similarly, ship graffiti found elsewhere and dating from other eras can provide opportunities for archaeologists to get a better understanding of the role of ships and shipping in the societies represented by these ship images.

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## APPENDIX A

### GLOSSARY OF NAUTICAL TERMINOLOGY

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>Aft</b>            | Towards, near, or at the stern of the ship.  |
| <b>Backstays</b>      | Ropes which support a mast. Fitted to the top of the mast they led down to the side of the ship where they were secured.   |
| <b>Barque</b>         | A sailing vessel with three, four or five masts; all except the aftermost mast are square-rigged. The aftermost mast, or driver, has fore and aft sails.                   |
| <b>Bobstay</b>        | Rigging running from the end of the bowsprit to the vessel's stem to support this spar in position from underneath.  |
| <b>Bow</b>            | The front part or fore end of a ship immediately after the stem.   |
| <b>Bowsprit</b>       | A spar or boom projecting out over the stem of a sailing ship at a slightly raised angle. Used for fitting fore and aft stays to the fore mast.                            |
| <b>Brig</b>           | A two masted sailing ship square-rigged on both masts.   |
| <b>Brigantine</b>     | A two masted sailing ship square-rigged on the fore mast and having fore and aft sails on the main mast.   |
| <b>Cleat</b>          | A metal or wood fitting on a base with a projecting on each side of the center. It is used for securing ropes by wrapping them around, criss-crossed underneath the horns. |
| <b>Clipper</b>        | A fast sailing ship with fine, tapering lines. The clipper was a combination of improved hull shape and rig of sails designed to achieve maximum speed.                    |
| <b>Deadwood</b>       | Blocks of timber assembled on top of the keel, usually in the ends of the hull, to fill out the narrow parts of a vessel's body.   |
| <b>Fine Run/Lines</b> | This is said of a vessel with a sharp slope upwards from the keel to each side.  |
| <b>Foot of Sail</b>   | The lower edge or bottom of a sail.  |

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(Glossary definitions adapted from Biddlecombe; Bradford 1972:26; Course; Johnson; MacGregor; Steffy 1994:266-282).

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <b>Fore and Aft</b>       | In the direction of the length of the ship. It is also the name sometimes given to a sailing ship with only fore and aft sails.   |
| <b>Fore and Aft Sails</b> | Triangular or rectangular shaped sails fitted on stays rigged between masts or on booms or gaffs fitted to the after side of the masts.   |
| <b>Fore Sail</b>          | The lowest sail on the fore mast.   |
| <b>Gaff</b>               | A spar fitted on a mast along which the head of a fore and aft sail is stretched. The fore and aft main sails of smaller vessels.   |
| <b>Grommet</b>            | A kind of ring, or small wreath, formed of a strand of rope, laid round three times, and used to fasten the upper edge of a sail to its respective stay in different places; by which means the sail is hoisted or lowered. |
| <b>Gunwale</b>            | The top or upper edge of a boat's side planking.  |
| <b>Halyards</b>           | Ropes that are used for hoisting sails, yards, flags, etc.  |
| <b>Head of Sail</b>       | The top of a square sail and the top corner of a fore and aft sail.   |
| <b>Head Sails</b>         | The jibs and fore topmast stay sail of sailing vessels.   |
| <b>Hull</b>               | The complete outside plating of a ship.   |
| <b>Jib</b>                | A triangular fore and aft sail set on the fore stays on the jib boom.   |
| <b>Jib boom</b>           | The boom projecting out beyond the bowsprit.  |
| <b>Jumper Stay</b>        | The horizontal stay stretching from mast head to mast head in a sailing ship.   |
| <b>Keel</b>               | The principle part of a ship's construction which is first laid down when the ship is being built. It is a continuous line lying fore and aft along the bottom middle line of a ship. A ship is built up from the keel.     |
| <b>Ketch</b>              | A small two masted sailing ship with fore and aft sails. The forward-most mast is the taller of the two.  |
| <b>Leg-o-Mutton Sail</b>  | A fore and aft sail without a boom. A tricing line, rather than reef points, is used for reducing the sail's area. The tricing line runs from the gaff headboard, passes through a grommet midway on                        |

the foot rope, up to a block on the opposite side of the mast then down to a cleat.

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <b>Main Sail</b>     | The largest and lowest sail on the main mast.   |
| <b>Mizzen</b>        | The third mast from the front of a vessel, usually on a sailing ship.   |
| <b>Peak Halyards</b> | The ropes by which the outer end of a gaff or yard that hangs obliquely to a mast that is hoisted.  |
| <b>Rake</b>          | The rake of a mast is its slope backwards from base to top. It gives the ship the appearance of speed.  |
| <b>Reef Band</b>     | A width of canvas stitched over the width of a sail, to strengthen it, where reef points are secured to it. Reef points are short lengths of rope used to reduce the surface of the sail. |
| <b>Rig</b>           | As a verb it is the action of fitting out a ship, such as sending up masts and yards. As a noun it is a type of vessel, as full-rigged ship.  |
| <b>Rigging</b>       | A general name given to all the ropes employed to support the masts, and to extend or reduce the sails.   |
| <b>Rudder</b>        | A timber or assembly of timbers that could be rotated about an axis to control the direction of a vessel underway.  |
| <b>Schooner</b>      | A sailing ship with two or more masts and fore and aft sails. Ship designations such as clipper-schooner or schooner-brigantine connote the combining of these hull forms and sail plans. |
| <b>Shallop</b>       | Vessels rigged with gaff sails. The fore mast was stepped far forward.  |
| <b>Sheet</b>         | A wire or rope attached to the bottom corner of sails and used to flatten the sails out when setting, or spreading them out.  |
| <b>Shrouds</b>       | A range of large ropes, extended from the mast head to both sides of the vessel, to support the masts.  |
| <b>Sloop</b>         | A one masted sailing ship with fore and aft sails.  |
| <b>Stay</b>          | Strong ropes to support the masts forward, which extend from their upper part, at the mast head, toward the fore part of the ship. Stays are named for the masts they extend from.        |

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Stay Sails</b>       | Triangular fore and aft sails set on, and hauled up stays.  |
| <b>Stem</b>             | A vertical or upward curving timber or assembly of timbers scarfed (joined) to the keel or central plank at its lower end and into which the two sides of the bow are joined. The first part of a ship to meet the sea when it is moving forward.                                 |
| <b>Stern</b>            | The aftermost portion of a vessel.  |
| <b>Top Mast</b>         | The mast above the main mast and below the topgallant mast. Also the sail on that mast.   |
| <b>Topgallant Mast</b>  | The mast above the topmast. Also the sail on that mast.   |
| <b>Topping Lift</b>     | A rope to suspend, or top, the outer end of a gaff, boom, etc.  |
| <b>Topsail</b>          | Originally a single sail above the lower sails. In 1854 double topsails were introduced; the smaller sails were easier to handle.   |
| <b>Topsail Schooner</b> | A schooner with a fore mast having a lower mast and a top mast with square sails above the fore sail.   |
| <b>Transom</b>          | A beam athwart ship (extending across from side to side) connected to the stern post of square-sterned wooden ships. Component parts of the stern of a ship have the prefix 'transom'.  |
| <b>Wale</b>             | A thick plank, or band of thick planking located along the side of a vessel for girding and stiffening the outer hull.  |
| <b>Water line</b>       | Figures cut into, or attached to the stem and sternpost to indicate the depth at which each end of the hull is immersed. Also known as the <b>load</b> , or <b>draft (draught) line</b> , this could be indicated on the outside of the hull by a change in paint type and color. |
| <b>Yard</b>             | Long, cylindrical pieces of timber hung to the masts of ships to expand the sails to the wind.  |

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