



Drainage ditches on Wormsloe

Photograph by Sarah Ross, 2010.

Although they are hardly the most dramatic features of Wormsloe's landscape, the drainage ditches that cut across the peninsula were among the plantation's most important foundations. Wormsloe lies on low, marshy ground, and drainage was essential to making a productive agricultural estate. Throughout the early and mid-1800s, and perhaps earlier, the Jones family worked to ditch and drain the land. Slaves and hired laborers dug these extensive drainage networks by hand, carving miles of ditches through Wormsloe's woods and swamps.

Ditches were essential to creating well-drained cotton and corn fields, but they also served another purpose that made Wormsloe more inhabitable. The mosquito varieties that transmit malaria to humans breed in standing fresh water, a habitat found in abundance along the marshy coastline. Although eighteenth and nineteenth century Georgians did not realize the connections between mosquitos and malaria, they did associate swamps with disease, and as a result they worked to create dry landscapes. Wormsloe's ditches, which carried water from the plantation's low spots to the surrounding estuary, reduced mosquito breeding sites and must have made life more pleasant (and longer) for the land's residents.