

The rice harvest took place at the end of August or during September. A ricehook was used to cut the stalks about a foot above the ground. The heads were dried on the stalks and usually stacked in the barnyard.

Processing rice was no easier than cultivation. First, the rice was threshed and winnowed to separate the straw from the grain. Since each grain of rice is enclosed in a tough, fibrous husk, it had to be placed in a mortar and pounded with a pestle for removal. The final process involved seiving the grain through two successive screenings to eliminate dust and broken grain. The rice then was placed in barrels for shipping.

In 1760, over 3000 barrels of rice were exported from Georgia. The Revolutionary War temporarily disrupted the expanding industry. While most planters had recovered from the war by the end of the 18th century, a series of hurricanes and floods hampered development of the crop. About this time, planters also began to realize that there was a relationship between the flooded rice fields and the outbreaks of malaria and yellow fever.

Despite setbacks in the early years of production, Georgia's rice crop

stood second only to South Carolina in the period preceding the Civil War. The state's rice industry reached its climax just before the Civil War.

Production peaked in 1850 when approximately 30,000 acres were devoted to the crop. Yields increased from 13,000,000 pounds in 1840 to 52,000,000 pounds in 1859. During this time, the rice industry was the largest type of plantation enterprise in the state.

After enjoying years of prosperity, the Civil War put an abrupt halt to the rice industry. The industry never completely recovered from the damage received when Union troops occupied the coastal area. In addition, a great hurricane hit coastal Georgia in the early 20th century which rendered many fields sterile with salt. These and other factors resulted in a slow decline of rice culture in Georgia.

Although some South Carolina and Georgia planters continued to grow rice until 1900, Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas eventually took over rice production. Rice production, like silk and indigo remains only on the pages of our agricultural history books.