Historical Background

- Fort Frederick was built by the British colonial government to protect approaches to Beaufort Towne from the Atlantic Ocean by way of Port Royal Sound and the Beaufort River.
- Estimates for the construction costs of the fort were presented on 20 January 1726 to the South Carolina Commons House of Assembly by Colonel William Rhett. Rhett had overseen construction of the defenses surrounding Charles Towne in 1707.
- An estimated 50,000 bushels of oyster shells were used to construct Fort Frederick.
- Barracks were probably completed before January 1733 because James Oglethorpe lodged a large group of Georgia's first settlers in the building while he looked for lands to settle around Savannah.
- Construction of the fort was complete, except for platforms, in 1734.
- The architect/engineer of the fort is not known, and the original plans for the fort have been lost.
- The best historical information we now have about the original construction of the fort is in the verbal description given by Robert Brewton who examined the nearly completed fort on behalf of the South Carolina Commons House of Assembly in 1734. Brewton stated that he saw four lines and two bastions, observing that the tabby walls were five feet high and five feet thick at the top. The fort contained a magazine, and this was described as leaky in 1739/1740. Brewton also mentioned barracks but does not give any location or dimensions leaving open the question as to whether or not such accommodations were constructed within the fort's enclosing walls. That is one of the research questions archaeologists working at the fort in 2014/2015 determined with their excavations.
- Fort Frederick was built by "Messrs. Bond and Delabere." A partial payment for construction was made on 24 January 1734 in the amount of £1,600.
- The fort was garrisoned from 1734/1735 until it was abandoned in the 1740s.
- Within six years of the fort's completion, the tabby walls had partially disassociated along the western wall, the barracks had deteriorated, and the magazine was unfit for service. Other than a few minor patches to the fort, no major repairs or alterations were authorized.
- Openings along the fort walls may have been original or alterations during the Civil War to provide access for a landing stage.
- In the late 1750s, permission was sought to remove material from Fort Frederick in order to construct Fort Lyttelton. It cannot be determined if this actually took place.
- Fort Lyttelton took the place of Fort Frederick in 1757.
- The fort varied in its number of occupants anywhere from two provincials to 100 British regulars.
- In 1785, the fort and its surrounding land were sold to Captain John Joyner on whose death in 1796 the property passed to his grandson John Joyner Smith (1790-1872). This tract of land was comprised of 700 acres by 1861 and was known during the late antebellum period as Old Fort, the Smith Place, or Smith's Plantation. By 1860, the

history of the fort is assumed to have been forgotten as people called the fort Old Spanish Fort or Smith's Fort.

- The fort was occupied by Union forces following the Battle of Port Royal in November 1861. It became the headquarters for the 1'1 South Carolina Regiment of Volunteers, a regiment of African-American soldiers. The site was renamed Camp Saxton after General Rufus Saxton (self styled Governor of the Sea Islands and leading advocate of the Port Royal Experiment).
- In 1863, the fort and its surrounding plantation land, as well as many other plantations on Port Royal Island were sold by the American government (Union authorities) for the non-payment of taxes. The amount owed on Old Fort plantation was $93.40. The U.S. government purchased the property for $1,000.
- In 1949, part of the site was developed as a U.S. Naval Hospital and associated housing.
- In 1974, Fort Frederick was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.
- The preserve was acquired in 1997 by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources with funds from the Heritage Land Trust Fund and by a donation from the National Park Service's Federal Land to Parks program.
- Fort Frederick is the oldest known tabby structure in South Carolina, and the oldest known tabby fort in the Southeastern United States.