

A History of Rivers Point Plantation Locale

Forward

Our James Island and Rivers Point Plantation development is steeped with history - both known and speculated. Surprisingly, I have not been able to find that type of a concise, chronological history of James Island and our area, which affords a reader an era by era treatise of historical, political, economic and sociological events that evolved to shape our area as we know it today. Early maps and charts are (geographically) very misleading and depiction of the topography and scale from one version to another leaves much to be desired - hence the speculation.

I am not a historian. I started this account on a whim, as an adjunct to our homeowners manual - thinking that it would be nice to know how this particular area of land we now reside on played a role in history. I thought you might like to know about it also - at least as much as I can decipher and translate.

My principal reference sources have been from notes taken from an interview with Dr. Crayton Frampton, curator of Seabrook (McLeods) Plantation, and three books: "The Last Foray, A Sociological Study of South Carolina Planters of 1860", by Chalmers Gaston Davidson; "James and Related Sea Islands", by James P. Hayes; and "A Sea Island Yankee", by Clyd Bresee. Each has afforded me a refreshing look, within their particular context, of life and times of people and places before us. I would encourage you to read these accounts yourself, both to collaborate my findings and also for your own reading enjoyment. The Sea Island Yankee dissertations by Mr. Bresee are, chapter by chapter, a particularly rewarding "John Boy" revelation of life in the early 1920's on a James Island plantation (Lawton's Bluff). Its reading has made me feel a little more humble and much more appreciative.

Toby Horn

The History

Other people, of other origins, were here long before our colonist ancestors came to this area from England. Carbon testing of some locally found Indian pottery reveals it to be approximately 4000 years old. The Charleston Museum has the remains of a 14th century "dugout" - a large crude canoe, made to expert marine architectural specifications - found in 1956 on Kiawah Island.

Our area was primarily inhabited by the Cusabo Indians, consisting of ten related tribes. They called their territory Chicora, which consisted of an area up and down the East coast and 30 miles inland from Mount Pleasant (Christ Church Parish) to Beaufort. The Cusabo Indian tribes here on James Island were Bohickets, Stonos and Kiawahs - the Kiawahs being those most likely to have lived in the Rivers Point Plantation area. They were, for the most part, very peaceable hunters and farmers - raising great fields of corn as well as plums, peaches, pecans, figs and other fruits to supplement their diet. They also raised tobacco and were heavy smokers; a habit that they taught the new white settlers when they came to settle this land.

James Island originally was called Boone's Island, named after John Boone, Jr., the island Watchman (keeper of the lookout tower located at Windmill Point, which would later become Fort Johnson).

On September 5, 1671, the governor of Carolina (Joseph West) and his council directed the Surveyor General to lay out a town to be named James Towne, the lots of which were laid out on both the North and South sides of "New Town Creek" (James Island Creek, the entrance of which, in those days, was over a mile wide compared with what you now see as you drive down Harbor View Road). The first children recorded to have been born on James Island were those of Peter and Mary Herne; Bridget and Richard, 1682 and 1685, respectively. The town survived only a few years, the early settlers leaving for many different reasons. Many were nomads, others died very young as was common in those days, and others re-established themselves on other parts of the island or inland in search for more land.

A map of 1695, made by John Thornton and Robert Morden, lists the names and location of all the settlers of the time. It covers an area from Seewee Bay to Edisto Island and approximately 40 miles inland. On this map, on James Island, are listed names of twenty settlers next to the location of their homes. Along the James Island side of Wappoo Creek (it was not called Wappoo Cut until about 1733) is a listing for William Rivers on 300 acres as of 1694. He had no direct male descendants, but he had many brothers and cousins that he lured here from Bermuda. Another "Mr. Rivers" is listed in what is now called the Clearview (near James Island Yatch Club) area; no doubt a William Rivers' relative. The next relatively accurate account of settlers came with a fairly good map dated 1711 where two new names were added in the James Island area and one deleted.

In August 1706, there was a brief episode in the Queen Anne's War (French and Indian War) where the Spanish, French and Indians used James Island as a landfall. Five enemy ships landed over 900 men in an effort to take Charleston. They burned and looted several plantations on James Island before the James Island and Johns Island militia attacked them near where Clearview is today and forced them back to their ships. After another defeat on Wando Neck just off of Dearby's Creek (now Shem Creek), and another a few days later in the Hobcaw area, the enemy ships withdrew, leaving over 300 dead or captured.

The 1739 Stono Slave Rebellion, instigated by the Spanish, started on John's Island, but did not spread to James Island. The movement of plunder, burning of stores and residences, and killing of white families spread South as the slaves tried to march to St. Augustine where they were promised asylum by the Spanish. Militia caught the slaves where they were camped in an open field about 15 miles South of where Ravenel now sits. Many were killed on the spot, but others were brought to Charleston where a trial was held. The leaders were hung, many were flogged, and a few were pardoned. The rebellion caused war to be declared on Spain on the 23rd of October 1739 and the tariff on importing slaves was drastically raised on April 5th, 1740.

At the end of the French and Indian War, the British government found itself in heavy debt in America. As we know history, the English Parliament put through a Stamp Act to pay off this debt. The colonies had not been consulted and there was much bitter resentment, especially in this area. In October 1765, the British garrison was made larger at Fort Johnson and the "stamps" were placed there for protective custody. The warship HMS Speedwell was placed near Fort Johnson for a show of force to quiet the angry mobs that were beginning to form. On the 26th of October, the mobs confronted the Royal Stamp Officer and the Commander of Fort Johnson and, in order to prevent a riot, these two men pledged not to enforce the Stamp Act until a repeal was requested. That night, however, Fort Johnson was captured in a daring raid - the entire garrison secured without a shot being fired. Cannon were loaded and manned and the British flag was taken down and replaced by a flag made by Christopher Gladson, consisting of a blue field with three white crescents. At daylight on the 27th, when the British Man o'War spotted the flag, they sent in an inquiry party. They were politely received by the rebels, shown the confiscated fort and stamps and told that the "badges of servitude" must be removed immediately from the entire province. Seeing that the rebel force was well armed and ready to fight, the stamps were removed to the ship and that afternoon it set sail from Charleston harbor.

In the Fall of 1778, the British decided to turn their strategy on the South. There was more Tory sentiment in the South and more vital exports in this area. They successfully fought off a siege of Savannah in December, and by May of 1779 a British army had ventured up from Georgia into the Charleston area. A force of 1500 Scots, 700 Hessians (Germans), 200 American Tories, 120 Indians (probably Creeks) and 1000 British troops bivouacked on James Island and conducted their military operations. On June 19th our militia engaged this force on land in The Battle of Stono but had to finally withdraw. On July 8th, a British detachment bivouacked at what is now Riverland Terrace, attacked

Mathew's Plantation across the Stono and wiped out almost the entire John's Island Rifle Company in a savage bayonet fight.

During the British siege of Charleston in 1780, British troops massed on John's and James Island. By the 14th of February, the English had taken over all the ferries on the Stono River and on the 20th started landing on James Island using Hamilton Landing (now Stono Plantation) and the landing at Peronneaus (the river end of Wappoo Drive). During late March, Fort Johnson received about 30 big caliber guns and the detachment there was increased to 150 men. The Watermelon Battery was built about this same time and sat about 150 yards from Stiles Mansion. On the 27th of March, four 24-pounder guns were set up in the area where Charleston Country Club is now. On the 19th of April, 24 ships came up the Stono and landed 2,600 more troops, adding to the nearly 10,000 that were already here. On the 26th of April, a 24 pounder at Watermelon Battery fired into Charleston and shot the left arm off of the William Pitt statue (Broad at Meeting). Legend has it that the gun was severely damaged when this round was fired. The British finally captured the city of Charleston on May 12th, 1780 and was to remain in their hands until December 1782.

It is interesting to note some of the observations of the invading forces. Writings of the German troops depict James and the other sea islands as being infested with venomous snakes and insects; wolves were too abundant; and 16-foot long crocodiles (alligators) were common. They stated how the inhabitants of Charleston were wealthier, better educated and more hospitable than those in any other English colony they visited. On the other hand they said they were more proud and vain than any others on the coast.

They must have learned to love it all, for at the end of the war many stayed here. When the British surrendered at Yorktown, Virginia on October 19th, 1781 it took a long time for the war to finally wind down. The last bloodshed of the war actually took place on James Island on November 14th, 1782 when a small force of Maryland Continentals got word from a black man of a British wood-cutting party working behind Fort Johnson. Having no reason to doubt this report, they immediately set out to drive the British back inside the confines of the fort. The Marylanders and many local volunteers proceeded from Peronneaus's, down Riverland Drive to Camp Road, and over to Fort Johnson; a half-days journey back then. When they arrived they found that it was a trap that had been set by the British. The fight lasted only 20 minutes, but left the Marylander's commander and many others dead. The next day, the British buried the dead Americans on Fort Johnson, with full military honors. This scrimmage behind Fort Johnson was the last time in the Revolution that Americans and English fought. On December 14th, 1782, the British Army sailed away from Charleston.

The 78 years that passed until the War Between The States do not have much recorded history. There was, however, a new enemy during this peaceful period - disease. Yellow Fever, Malaria and other unknown types of fever seemed rampant; even epidemic at times. The old hospital at Fort Johnson was used as the Harbor Quarantine for many years. During the 1830s, Folly Island had some quarantines marooned there. In 1834 a Lazaretto (called a Pest House) was built on Morris Island. The sea island planters

summered at various places to try to escape the fever-ridden areas. James Island planters summered at Coles Island where they sat out the fever months. Later, about 1851, Secessionville and Fort Johnson became their summer places.

There was, of course, the War of 1812, but this was fought mostly at sea; two or three sea battles being fought off of the coast here. There was a brief skirmish between naval and marine forces in the mouth of the Stono River, but records of this are very sketchy and little is known about the event.

An 1825 South Carolina Atlas, compiled by Robert Mills lists all the surnames of planters, plus other points of interest. The Martello Tower at Fort Johnson is listed, Cut Bridge is shown over the narrow end of James Island Creek, and the Wappoo Ferry, which went to the mainland from James Island, was at the end of Riverland Drive. Only seven surnames appear on James Island, including several branches of the Rivers family. The name Price appears where later the Freer property would be on Camp Road (Whitehouse Plantation Subdivision). The name Fraser appears on Dills Bluff Road (Battery Point Subdivision). The name Lawton is in the Lawton Bluff area (the old house there is not the Lawton House - it is the Cuthbert House - over a hundred years old at the time this map was made). The name Harvey appears out in the Stiles Point area. The Holmes surname is listed in the area of Burclair and Westchester, and the name Turnbull is out in the south corner where Gresham Meggett High School is located. At least one member of the Rivers family was living on Wadmalaw. A footnote is added to the research text concerning this, that..."We went to great effort to borrow the genealogical history of the Rivers family, but were unsuccessful."

Between the two great wars, the planters of the sea islands were to become, in most cases, the richest people in America. Cotton was king. Eli Whitney's cotton gin came along before 1800. Indeed, by 1789, a Mrs. Ramage of James Island was manufacturing cotton cloth.

If I interpret my research correctly, this was largely due to our research focal point - a man by the name of Elias Lynch Rivers.

Our Rivers Point Plantation subdivision was once part of the Secessionville Plantation, which was owned by the Seabrook family. As can best be determined, it was through his marriage to Martha Seabrook that Elias Lynch Rivers obtained the land which he then called Centerville Plantation. The topography of the Centerville (Rivers) Plantation is believed to be bounded on the North by James Island Creek; East to the branch of water (originally called Wolfpit Run) running in from James Island Creek and bounding Creekpit and Whitehouse Plantation, continuing along a line down Secessionville Road; West to Riverland Drive; and South on a line with Cut Bridge and Fort Johnson Road(s).

Centerville was to become the first working plantation to be developed on James Island. Elias was a hard working, inventive and benevolent person who worked with other plantation owners to develop money crops and harvest methods that were to become a standard for decades to come. He did much research and conducted experiments with soil, cross-seeding and irrigation. Finally, Elias successfully developed a new strain of cotton, which resisted poor soil and climate conditions. He started the Sea Island Cotton Plantation Growers Association, which yielded the best cotton on the Eastern seaboard due to its "good staple" (long, tough strands of cotton in each ball) - most of which was bought up and exported to England at \$1.00 - \$1.50 per pound. The secret of the cotton seed was closely held, and at these prices for the high demand cotton, the growers became very wealthy. This period of relative tranquility and prosperity was, as we know, to be rudely interrupted by the Civil War.

On December 20th, 1860 at 6:30 P.M. at a ceremony in Charleston on Meeting Street, South Carolina voted on secession from the Union. Within a week, the Union Army troops stationed at Fort Moultrie moved by boat under cover of darkness to Fort Sumter. The Confederacy immediately took over Fort Moultrie, Castle Pinckney and Fort Johnson and started construction of a battery on Morris Island. "Fort Morris" was manned on December 31st by a Citadel officer, forty of his cadets, and four 24-pound field Howitzer cannon. It was from here that the actual first shot of the war between the States occurred.

As expected, the Union Army tried to reinforce Fort Sumter. On January 5th, 1861 the "Star of the West" sailed from New York, supposedly in secret. The only people who didn't know about it were the men stationed in Fort Sumter. On the morning of the 9th, the ship steamed across the bar towards Charleston Harbor. The cadets at Fort Morris fired several shots at the ship and finally hit her near the rudder. Guns at Fort Moultrie also fired, but the range was too great. The "Star of the West" finally turned back to New York.

Confederate troop buildup began in the area, with most of the troops being stationed on Morris Island because an amphibious landing was expected. On April 10th, President Jefferson Davis sent word to General Beauregard to demand surrender of Fort Sumter. These demands were made on the afternoon of the 11th and refused, and again, nine hours later, on the 12th at 1:00 A.M. in the morning and refused. At 2:10 A.M. on a rainy, dreary morning, the first shot on Fort Sumter was fired from a 10-inch mortar at Fort Johnson. This was joined by 47 other guns at Fort Johnson and those on Morris Island (Cummings Point Battery and the Iron Battery, formerly called Fort Morris). Thirty-four hours and 3,307 shots later, Fort Sumter surrendered.

The two most recognized battles in which James Island played a vital part of the war were the Battle of Secessionville and the Battle for Fort Wagner made famous by the movie "Glory".

Most people think the Battle of Secessionville was a minor engagement that took place over the course of a few hours. Actually it was a series of skirmishes that lasted practically a month, fought on and across the Rivers Plantation, leaving only two buildings standing when the campaign was through. Many war historians and strategists agree that if the results had been different, the war would have been over two years sooner. (The occupation of Charleston would have occurred very soon thereafter. Charleston was the back door to the Confederacy; blockade runners averaged 85% success in keeping a vital supply route open).

The Secessionville Campaign actually started on May 19, 1862 when Union ships began entering the Stono Inlet between Kiawah and Folly Islands, coming up the Stono and shelling both sides, and forcing the withdrawal of Confederate troops and artillery in towards Secessionville. A tall wooden lookout tower was built there and artillery exchanged fire with the Union ships. On the morning of June 2nd there was a heavy artillery fight between the ships and shore batteries, but casualties were particularly minor - the North had none and the South lost an outhouse and a horse. That evening, however, the landing of Northern troops began. Their masses soon over-rode some of the forward big guns which the Confederates could not move because of the mud. Early the next morning, the Confederate troops mounted an assault on the Union forces and managed to drive them back until they were within range of the heavy ship's guns. The green Southern troops withdrew and a temporary command post was set up at the Rivers house (located on Old Military Road within 20 feet of where the Townsend house sits today, owned by one of his descendants). Elias Rivers was then a Captain in the Confederate Army.

Work continued to build the earth fort at Secessionville, which in those days was described as "an area that looked like a sea of cotton". Skirmishes continued for the next several days, but without many casualties on either side. Headquarters were changed several times to meet the threat of the massing of Union troops which were being landed at Seabrook Island, marched across John's Island to Legareville and ferried onto Battery Island. On the 10th, the Confederates launched an attack to clear the woods down Grimball Road and set up a battery. He lost 70 men in the attempt. On the 16th at 4:30 in the morning, the Union troops launched an attack on Fort Lamar (this name actually was not used until almost one year later) in a series of three bayonet, hand-to-hand charges, battle and withdrawal. The Confederate troops held their ground under three successive commands during these charges. Col. Julian Lamar was wounded on the first charge, Col. Palmer Galliard on the second, and Col. Thomas Wagner commanded the defense on the third and final charge by the Union troops. The third charge ended the Battle of Secessionville and the Union withdrew its troops. The North had lost 689 men, the South lost 144.

Fort Wagner was originally called the Neck Battery, but renamed for Col. Wagner of Secessionville fame, who was later killed in a battle at Fort Moultrie. It was built across the narrow section of Morris Island, measuring 630 feet East to West and 275 feet North to South. The Union had over 3000 men on Seabrook Island and over 4000 men on Folly Island where they were busy building batteries to aid them in their planned assault across

Lighthouse Inlet (where the old lighthouse stands today) and onto Morris Island (which is now, as known, completely washed away). The Union troop count would quickly rise to 17,483, excluding Navy forces. The Union wanted Morris Island because it was low-lying and considered more easily defended, and it would provide full Navy bombardment support. At this time, there were under 6000 Confederate troops in the general area and a full one-third of these were in the city and East Cooper areas.

At daybreak on July 10th, 1863 - the initial day of assault - 47 guns of all sizes started pounding the Confederate battery at the end of Morris Island. Soon afterwards, 3 Ironclads, the Nahant, Montauk and Weehawken opened up with their 11 inch guns. Three hours later, after firing nearly 10,000 rounds to soften things up, the Yankee barges started shuttling over 2000 men across Lighthouse Inlet onto Morris Island. The 700 Confederate men in the small battery held their ground for a while and fought gallantly, but the battery was soon completely overrun, forcing the men to retreat back to Fort Wagner. 274 of the 700 Confederates and 106 Union men were killed during this assault.

The Union bivouacked that night in the overrun fortifications. At daybreak they started their assault on Fort Wagner, 3 miles down the beach. They got to the outer parapets and met a hail of gunfire and had to retreat. 339 Union troops and 12 Confederates were killed in this first assault. For the next several days there were brief skirmishes and artillery fire exchanges. In the meantime, both the Union and Confederate troops were skirmishing inland on James Island, trying to strategically position themselves for the upcoming battle - for assault support or defense and supply, respectively. It was during one of these forays that the first black Union troops (54th Massachusetts) were engaged - the first combat of any Negro unit in the history of South Carolina. Over 30 were killed and 14 captured; the Confederates lost 6.

The Union used the 17th of July to amass troops and artillery on the South end of Morris Island. The next morning at 8:10 A.M., Fort Wagner, Fort Sumter and Fort Gregg started bombarding these troops. The Union trained all their guns on Fort Wagner and fired an average of 14 rounds per minute until nightfall - a devastating bombardment by standards of those days. Only 4 Confederates of the fort's 1300 defenders were killed, however, during this bombardment. At 8:00 P.M., the Union troops came out of their earthworks and began their assault. The few remaining Confederate batteries on James Island drenched the beach with grape and shrapnel shot. The first wave of Union assault troops (lead by the 54th Massachusetts Negro troops) moved onward through devastating fire from the fort. The tide was, as planned, high so the Union gunboats could be closer for fire support. Many of the assault troops had to run through knee-deep water. The dead and wounded were actually piling up the rifle pits in front of the fort. The black troops of the 54th followed their white commander to the top of the parapets and were nearly all killed. The few remaining black troops turned back and fled, confusing the troops behind them and causing many of them to turn back. Only half of the planned frontal assault troops were actively engaged, and some of the wounded were drowning in the high tidal water. Union troops soon began breaching the left wall and there was much hand-to-hand fighting, attempted bayonet charges and point-blank volleys. The main body of Union troops finally had to retreat, leaving two of their units inside the fort that fought

with fierce resistance for the next 3 hours.

When it was all over, the Union had lost 2000 men and 140 captured, Confederate troops lost between 174 - 188 (account varies). Fort Wagner never really fell to the Union through battle. For the next several months, it was constantly bombarded as was Fort Johnson and Fort Sumter. The guns on Fort Sumter were finally completely disabled in a heavy barrage beginning on September 1st and lasting until the 6th. During this time, the Confederates were sneaking ordnance and supplies off of Morris Island. At 1:30 A.M. on the morning of the 7th the last of the Confederates left Fort Wagner and Morris Island. One of the Georgia privates who was among the last to leave is quoted as saying, "I ain't afeared of Hell no more. It can't touch Fort Wagner."

James Island remained a seesaw battleground having several major skirmishes (Swamp Angle, Bloody Bridge/Waterloo Plantation, Grimbball's Causeway) until the last local battle on February 10th, 1865. There were no civilian residents on the Island, all having fled to safety inland. By the late 1860's, James Island was in a state of economic collapse due to the war. Only six plantation houses survived the occupation (Seabrook [McLeod's] was spared because it served as a hospital for both Union and Confederate troops as it changed hands several times). Oddly enough, the destruction and looting was attributed mostly to Southern troops called "crackers" who had no regard for any kind of property. A small pox epidemic right after the Civil War further delayed Island landowners from returning and starting all over again.

The Island would return to prosperity over the next decade, largely due to the leadership, inspiration and efforts of Captain Elias Rivers and a Mr. W. G. Hinson in civic, economic, cultural and religious affairs. The unique cotton of the Sea Islands, developed by Elias Rivers, would again drive the economy of the Island until just after World War I and the infestation of the boll weevil. This insect ended the reign of cotton, but planters soon turned to truck farming of white potatoes, cucumbers, corn, sorghum, velvet beans and sweet potatoes. Dairy farming also got its start.

By 1921, a dozen plantations comprised the larger part of James Island, including Centerville - Rivers (am still trying to research the distinction between the two), Lawton, McLeod, Stiles Point, Stono, Whitehouse, Seaside, Secessionville, and Oyster Point. The planters would alternately attend the Episcopal church on one Sunday, the Presbyterian the next. Martha Love Rivers, daughter of Elias Rivers, would become the principal of James Island Grammar School, and play the organ on Sunday at the Episcopal church.

Other interesting facts include:

The hurricane of 1885, when over fifty island buildings were blown down.

The August 31st, 1886 earthquake. All clocks were reported as being stopped at 9:50 P.M. Witnesses said that before the shaking there was a long sustained hellacious growl in the earth. An after-shock occurred at 11:45 the next night.

The hurricane of 1893 when the island lost much of its livestock, buildings were blown away.

The hailstorms of May 1894 where stones were reported to be as big as plums.

Just before the turn of the century, James Island was one of four townships in Charleston County. The others were McClellanville, Sullivan's Island and Mt. Pleasant.

Fort Johnson Road was the main street on the island, running from about one block across Folly on Grimball Road to Three Trees (the junction at Lighthouse Road, near the James Island Youth soccer fields).

The original James Island Post Office was on the Southwest corner of Secessionville and Fort Johnson Roads.

Folly Road was cut in about 1902 and paved in 1930. It was the island's first paved road. Much of the earth bedding for the road came from what is now the lake in Rivers Point Plantation.

The bridge over Wappoo Cut was opened February 1st, 1899.

Clearview, in the old days, was called Orangegrove. About 1870, many orchards of oranges were grown there. For a few years James Island gave Florida some competition.

In the last days of the 19th Century, a man who grew 100 acres of cotton would make up to \$15,000 per year. To show how astronomical this was, \$5.00 a week was the average wage. The high yield cotton developed and grown by Elias Rivers at Centerville (our area) averaged 434 pounds per acre.

The first island store was Rivers Store, located on Old Military Road at Secessionville.

Next to the problem of boll weevils and caterpillars, the island suffered from four kinds of wilt during the 1890s. For a while, cotton, peas, okra and watermelons had types of wilt. It is said that Elias Rivers soon solved this problem.

The Battle of Secessionville was commemorated by a monument in 1929. In 1956, because of vandals and souvenir seekers, it was removed to the Presbyterian Churchyard, where it now sits.

Perhaps one of the most interesting stories in recent years is that of "Porgy" of the musical Porgy and Bess. George Gerschwin wrote the bulk of this musical while here (Folly Beach) on vacation, and he is said to have based his characters on real people of the area. The real name of Porgy was John Smalls. He was crippled and was pulled around by a goat cart. He never had a woman named Bess and he never left for New York. He is buried in an unmarked grave in the Black cemetery near the James Island Presbyterian Church.