

## **James Town on Santee ~**

A grant was made January 15, 1705 to Rene Ravenel, Bartholomew Gaillard, and Henry Bruneau for 360 acres of land “for themselves and all the rest of the inhabitants settled on Santee River from the plantation of Mr. Philip Gendron, inclusive . . . to dispose of by the said inhabitants as they shall think fit for a town by the name of James Town on Santee.”

A meeting was held January 29, 1706, and a resolution was adopted to set aside 140 acres of land on the bank of the river for a town and to dispose of the rest of the land to the best advantage. Bartholomew Gaillard was named surveyor, and Thomas Gaillard assistant surveyor. Jean Guibal, Rene Ravenel, Bartholomew Gaillard, Jr., and Henry Bruneau were appointed commissioners to sell the town lots, prices being sixty shillings each for the lots nearest the river and forty shillings each for the others. (Today, a shilling is roughly equivalent to a U.S. penny.) A square on each side of the church was appropriated for a commons. Facing the commons and the church were the higher priced lots.

Twenty-seven lots were sold, but there is no evidence that houses were built on any of them, and by 1708, families began leaving that neighborhood, some going into the section which became the parish of St. Stephen and others into the upper part of St. John’s Berkeley. A few families remained in that section, but the site upon which the town had been laid out soon became a wilderness. Later, the area covered by the grant was acquired by Samuel J. Palmer and became known as Mount Moriah plantation.

It appears that the French immigrants were both industrious and religious. The Huguenots were Protestant refugees who were being persecuted in their homeland by the Catholic royalty. The British were sympathetic of their plight and allowed them to settle in Carolina. The first permanent colony including French Huguenots was established at Port Royal in 1670, with South Carolina soon becoming the principal retreat of the Huguenots in the New World.

By 1685, French settlers had begun to settle the Santee River swamp, and by 1700, more than 80 families had settled there. By 1705, the number of families had risen to approximately 100, and the area contained the largest French settlement in South Carolina outside of Charles Town.

At that time, Santee and Sewee Indians were also living along the lower Santee region. Within a short time, this area became known as the French Santee

settlement, and was distinguished from the English Santee settlement located further upstream. The Huguenots got along well with the Indians and learned much from them about their new environment.

Before 1700, the Huguenots established five churches in the Province. In addition to the one at James Town, they built three other churches in the country parishes: one at Goose Creek about 1694, on property of Abraham de la Plain a mile northeast of Ladson; one at Orange Quarter, and one near Biggin Creek just east of the place known as Simpson's Basin (on the old Santee Canal). The only pastor of this church was the Reverend Florente Trouillard.

The James Town church built prior to 1700 became united with the Church of England, and when that section was placed in the parish of St. James Santee in 1706, the church at James Town was made the parish church. This wooden church, on a brick foundation, was probably built between April 1706 and December 1706, where it functioned as the parish church until May 11, 1754.

The first minister of this church was said to have been the distinguished Reverend Pierre Robert, who was the first Calvinistic minister in South Carolina. He came to Santee in 1686 from Bale, Switzerlerland, and died in Santee in 1715. He was succeeded by Claude Phillippee de Richbourg, a Huguenot pastor who came to Virginia in 1699 as minister of the French Colony at Manakin Town on the James River. He left the colony and came to South Carolina as minister of the French settlement at Santee and died there in 1719.

A Chapel of Ease to the parish church at James Town was built at Echaw pursuant to an act of the General Assembly June 12, 1714, and the rector of the parish church was required to serve both, officiating alternately. (Echaw Creek and the chapel site are located at Honey Hill.)

In 1731, it was declared that the chapel at Echaw was of small use to the greatest part of the inhabitants and the General Assembly directed that another chapel of ease be built in the lower part of the parish, and another one in the upper part of the parish, the rector of the parish church to hold services one Sunday in the parish church, the next Sunday in the lower chapel, and the third Sunday in the upper chapel. It appears, however, that the little wooden chapel at Echaw continued to be used until it was destroyed by fire several years later.

The James Town site was located on the south bank of the Santee River, in the lower coastal plain of Berkeley County, approximately 20 miles from the

Atlantic Ocean. The town site was to be situated on a high bluff, approximately 25 feet above sea level (as shown on the Jamestown quadrangle of U.S.G.S. 1973 map), the site located north of Hell Hole Swamp and State Road 45, and east of U.S. Highway 17A and Lenud's Ferry site on Santee River.

Several other important features were associated with the town, which may be encountered archaeologically. One was the fortified house of Reverend Claude de Richbourg, rector of St. James Santee Parish, located near James Town. Richbourg's house served as a refuge and military garrison throughout the Yamassee War. In 1716, Bartholomew Gaillard was listed as superintendent of an Indian factor. Gaillard's trading post may have been located outside of town.

The actual date of abandonment of James Town is (archaeologically) problematic, however, it was largely abandoned by 1760. When the earliest census was conducted, in 1790, St. James Santee Parish contained a total of 3,433 persons – 3,202 of which were slaves. By 1830, Jamestown had already been incorporated into a 490-acre plantation, when Theodore Gourdin II, executor for his father's estate, conveyed the property to Samuel J. Palmer. By that time, it was no longer referenced as Jamestown, but was known as Mount Moriah.

In 1931, the Huguenot Society of South Carolina commemorated the St. James Santee Church site at Mount Moriah by erecting a granite cross. Similar crosses were erected on other Huguenot Church sites, all of which are on private property.

Keith Gourdin

*References: Historic Berkeley County 1671-1900, by Maxwell C. Orvin, Historic Ramblin's Through Berkeley, by J. Russell Cross, Jamestown Reconnaissance Survey by Daniel T. Elliott, Lamar Institute, Inc. & Carl Steen, Diachronic research Foundation, Inc., and Transactions from The Huguenot Society of South Carolina.*

