

French Santee and Its Places of Interest ~

The south bank of Santee River was settled almost entirely by French Huguenots, who were mainly planters (today we call them farmers). They were the largest group of Huguenots in the province, outside of Charles Town, during the early years of the settlement. By 1690, eighty families of French origin had settled there in the French Santee area from Lenud's Ferry to Mazyck's Ferry, just below Wambaw Creek. The area up-river from Lenud's Ferry was settled, chiefly, by English and became known as English Santee. The date of the original settlement cannot be fixed. A number of grants of land have been found with the date 1685.

Refugees settled on plantations to cultivate the vine, olives, and silkworms. None of these worked out, but the settlers were successful in planting indigo, rice, and other crops. Where there was a crop loss due to flooding, naval stores (articles or materials used in the shipping) provided work and income. Jamestown was the principal center and only town settlement. The center of religious and political life was the Church at Jamestown.

When John Lawson, Deputy Surveyor General for the British government, toured South Carolina in January of 1700, he visited the Santee settlement and reported that the French "were very friendly and their homes neat and clean." Also, there was "a wholesome community spirit among them and kindly cooperation."

As the original French settlers died, their offspring moved to more favorable agricultural areas, up-river, in St. Stephen's and Upper St. John's Berkeley Parishes. They abandoned their homes in French Santee to seek a place more suited to the growth of indigo, a chief source of their wealth. They achieved substantial prosperity by the cultivation of indigo and rice.

The migration to more northerly regions of the province began about 1709 and continued for about twelve years, replenishing the population of St. Stephen's and St. John's Berkeley Parishes. Despite the migration to adjoining parishes, many of the French remained in St. James, Santee Parish.

Today, only an occasional pile of bricks mark the spot where once a plantation house stood. Old banks mark the fields used for rice culture.

Jamestown – the first French Huguenot settlement in South Carolina on the Santee River began in 1685, and in 1705 the town was established. The Lords Proprietors granted land for a town and part of the grant was divided into lots.

On July 4, 1706, the settlers appointed five commissioners to sell lots and thirty-six were sold. The site was on top of a thirty-foot limestone bluff. It was well drained and easily protected from Indian attack. The community was agricultural and there was little interest in trading or business.

The town was never extensively occupied for an extended period of time, and it did not prosper. A church was built, and services held regularly in the French language. This building was of wood on a brick foundation and constructed at an unrecorded time. Today, a simple stone monument marks the spot where the church once stood, this being erected by the Huguenot Society of South Carolina in 1922.

Mt. Moriah Plantation – is located where the abandoned town of French Jamestown was, the site becoming the property and part of the plantation of Col. S.J. Palmer. The abandoned town site soon became as any other plantation field.

Records indicate that in 1830, Theodore Gourdin conveyed to Samuel Jerman Palmer, a plantation of 490 acres on the Santee River by the name of “Mt. Moriah.” This plantation embraced the entire 141 acres reserved for a town.

Ballsdam Plantation – is located west of present-day Jamestown on Hwy. 17-A, bordering Santee River on the north. It has a long and interesting history. The Reverend Pierre Robert, the first Calvinistic minister in South Carolina, was an earlier owner. He was the first minister to travel by horseback to reach his congregation.

Dr. John Saunders Palmer owned the plantation prior to 1860. He was one of the signers of the Ordinance of Succession.

The plantation changed ownership a number of times and is presently owned by the estate of former Governor and Mrs. Robert E. McNair. He inherited it from his father, D.E. McNair, who bought it in the early 1930’s. McNair came to this state from North Carolina with the lumber business.

Originally the place was desirable for timber, but McNair was most interested in farming. The original house, referred to as the “Old Manse,” was destroyed by fire during the Great Depression in the 1930’s. The present used house is a good example of a pineland village summer house.

Lenud’s Ferry – was an important river crossing since early in the 18th century. The rights to establish the ferry were granted to Jonathan Skrine in 1731, then passed on to Robert Lenud. He and his brothers operated the crossing until the Revolutionary

War. I gave you a detailed ‘bit of history’ on Lenud’s Ferry in the *Berkeley Independent’s* September 21st issue, so won’t give you more here.

Also told you a bit about the American Revolution skirmish on May 6, 1780, where Patriots commanded by Lt. Col. Anthony W. White and Lt. Col. William Washington occupied a camp at Lenud’s Ferry, on the banks of the Santee, including British prisoners recently captured at Wambaw Plantation. Discovering that White had not posted security for his camp, the British Legion, commanded by Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton, charged full speed into the camp, routing the Patriots. With their backs to the Santee River, the Patriots faced gunfire and slashing swords from the mounted enemy. The Patriot forces had 11 killed, 30 wounded, and 67 captured, and almost all of White’s horses were captured earlier. White and Washington swam across the Santee to avoid capture and could only watch the slaughter from the other side of the river.

Honey Hill – was originally known as “Jerman’s Pineland” and was founded on the Santee River as a summer refuge village from the fevers (that became what we now know was malaria).

In the middle eighteenth century, the rice planters of the low country began annual migrations from the plantations (in the swamp) to summer pineland villages. The departure date was not always the same, but generally took place from May to November, or after the first frost. Families formerly staying year-round on the Santee River plantations now sought refuge from the swamps during the “sickly season.”

Moving, or relocating, for the summer, could be a major undertaking, so many planters kept the plantation house furnished with the larger pieces of furniture, and only smaller necessities were moved to the summer house.

Echaw Chapel-of-Ease – for St. James, Santee Parish Church, was first constructed of wood in ca. 1714 but was destroyed by fire in 1742. Later, in 1748, the Chapel was rebuilt of brick. Echaw Chapel-of-Ease was located northeast of Echaw Creek, near present-day Honey Hill community.

Two Deed abstracts for Echaw Chapel are interesting, and read like this: “Peter Dumay, planter, of St. James Santee, Craven Co., to Daniel Horry, Paul Bruneau, Ralph Jerman, Peter Robert, & John Gendron, Jr., commissioners appointed by Act of Assembly for building a Chapel of Ease at Itchaw for use of the inhabitants of the Parish; for a chapel & burying place, 2 ac., not far from Itchaw

Creek, being part of 200 ac. granted to John Francis Gngnilliot on 11 Feb 1696/7. Witnesses: Elias Horry, Jacob Jeanneret, William Thomas. Before Paul Trapier, J.P. John Beale, Register.”

“Jane Dumay, widow of St. James Santee, Craven County, to Edward Jerman & Peter Guerry, gentlemen, of same parish, trustees for inhabitants who subscribed for the building of a house on some land near the church of Itchaw (Echaw), to be used as a shelter from bad weather on Sundays, holy days, & at assembly of the company militia at muster there; a small piece of land about ¼ ac., bounding N on church yard; E on road to Charleston; W on Mrs. Dumay. Witnesses; John Hentie, Benjamin Perdiau. Before Paul Douxsaint, J.P. Recorded 27 Dec 1766 by Fenwicke Bull, Register.”

Tombstones at Echaw Cemetery are few now, some were moved to St. James Santee Parish Church (old Brick Church on old King’s Highway), and many made from wood no longer are to be found or seen.

Further east of Echaw, we come to an earthen fort, strategically located on the Santee River, constructed in the Civil War year of 1862, to control the Santee River passage and raiding by Union forces in the interior of the state.

Battery Warren – is located approximately twenty-two miles from the mouth of south Santee River. The battery was named after Colonel Samuel Warren. Battery Warren consists of two earthen parapets (a protective wall or earth defense along the top of a trench or other place of concealment for troops) coming together in an L-shape on the banks of the Santee River. A third earthen parapet lies further inland to the southeast to provide protection from an overland assault from the rear.

Attacking Battery Warren from the river was made even more challenging by the natural riverbank and by a moat that was dug along the parapet angling away from the river. The moat today is about a fifteen-foot climb, probably a much higher climb at the time of construction. The battery is protected from an attack from the west by a low swampy area, possibly enhanced by borrowing material for the construction of the parapets.

Rather than go into more detail, I’d prefer you’d get the booklet by Robert G. Pasquill, Jr., available at the Berkeley County Museum, entitled *Battery Warren and The Santee Light Artillery*. Much detail! And you will enjoy!

Wattahan (Waterhorn) Plantation – was established by Daniel Huger, one of the earliest French Huguenots to settle in the French Santee region. It was composed of three grants to Huger in 1696, 1704, and 1705.

Records show that a son was born to Huger in 1688 in Craven County in St. James, Santee River. We learn from history that Wattahan was visited in the early 1700's by John Lawson, who spent the evening at "Mons. Eugie's House."

The plantation passed out of Huger's ownership in 1716 to John Mayrant, in 1765 to Elias Horry, and sometime later to Thomas Horry, and then to Phillip Tidyman.

We come next to **Wambaw Creek**, the dividing line between Berkeley and Charleston counties. There is much, much American Revolution and Civil War period history about these plantations and Wambaw Creek . . . too much to begin in this article. So, I'm hoping you are inspired to the point you will contact me with 'bits of history' you know about this area, and others, of our county. We must record what we know of our rich Berkeley County history. You can do it. Just start writing.

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