

## **Old Jamestown, Why Was It Abandoned?**

The earliest French attempts at settlement in Carolina followed soon after the repeal of the Edict of Nantes in 1562, when a group of Huguenots, led by Jean Ribault, was unsuccessful in establishing a colony.

The Huguenots were a group of Protestants who became the center of political and religious quarreling in France during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The word “Huguenot” was a nickname originally given to Protestants at Tours, France. The group is thought to have assembled for Divine worship under cover of darkness near the “Bate of King Hugo.” Hugo was regarded by people as a spirit that wandered abroad during the night hours. Huguenots became refugees who were being persecuted in their homeland by the Catholic royalty.

Within a forty-year period, thousands of Huguenots were slaughtered because they desired to worship God according to their “dictates of conscience.” On April 13, 1598, they obtained passage of the Edict of Nantes, which constituted a Charter of political and religious freedom for the Huguenots. The Catholic Clergy refused to accept validity of the Edict, which stirred up further persecutions of the Huguenots, and on October 18, 1685, Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes on the pretext that adherents of Protestantism had embraced Catholicism. (Note: Huguenot persecutions were very much similar to the atrocities we hear taking place on today’s news; just as bad, if not worse; unbelievable!) About 400,000 abandoned all possessions and left France for England. Many, later, came to America, primarily to enjoy religious freedom after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

Huguenots were Calvinists, or Reformed. Huguenots “embraced with enthusiasm” the hopes and disciplines of Calvinism. That was their “real driving power.” Max Weber agrees: Calvinist piety “penetrated and dominated their whole lives.”

The first permanent colony including French Huguenots was established at Port Royal in 1670. South Carolina soon became the principal retreat of the Huguenots in the New World. Reverend Richebourg brought part of his Huguenot congregation to the Carolinas from Virginia and nearly a thousand Huguenots emigrated to Carolina from Holland alone.

The British were sympathetic of the Huguenot plight and allowed them to settle in Carolina. Emigrants were attracted to four principal regions outside of Charles Town; at the headwaters of the Ashley River near Wassamassaw; the Eastern

Branch of the Cooper River at French Quarter Creek; and (what was to become) Jamestown, along the Santee River, north and south sides.

By 1685, French settlers had begun to settle the Santee River Swamp, primarily from Lenud's Ferry to Mazyck's Ferry, just below Wambaw Creek, and by 1700, more than eighty families had settled there. The area up river from Lenud's Ferry was settled, chiefly, by English, and became known as English Santee. The date of this original settlement has not been fixed, though a number of grants of land have been found with the date of 1685.

By 1705, the number of families had risen to approximately 100, and the Lords Proprietors ceded to the French inhabitants a tract of land for a town or a plantation in common, as they should prefer. This settlement was, and continued for some time, to be the most advanced settlement of Europeans towards the interior and Northern portions of the province. The area contained the largest French settlement in South Carolina outside of Charles Town.

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

Refugees settled on plantations to cultivate the vine, olives, and silk wares. None of these worked out, but the settlers were successful in planting indigo, rice, and other crops. When there was a crop loss due to flooding (keeping in mind they were living in Santee Swamp!), naval stores provided work and income.

The principal center for the Huguenots became known as Jamestown, created shortly after January 29, 1705/6. The town site originally was to include 141 acres on the bank of the Santee. Twenty-four numbers were assigned to lots within the town, but eventually, a total of thirty-six lots were distributed. In addition to the thirty-six lots, the town contained a church, parsonage, cemetery, glebe, commons area, and a rectangular road network. (see redrawn plats)

Lots 1 through 24 originally sold for 40 shillings each; Lots 25 to 30 for 60 shillings; and Lots 31 to 36 for 40 shillings (10 shillings = .06 cent today). No records are available for sale of eight of the lots. Jamestown lots were purchased by Gaillard, Chastaigner, Guibal, Ravenel, Gendron, Robert, Bruneau, Pastie, DuBose, Cadeaux, Thibout, Foucherou, Rambert, Carrion, Lejeau, Seron, Couillandean, and Nord, and as you can tell, many of these family names are no longer in existence.

The date of abandonment of Jamestown is uncertain, however, it was largely abandoned by 1760. When the earliest census was conducted, in 1790, St. James 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 of Theodore Gourdin I, (my 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Gr-Grandfathers) deceased, conveyed the property to Samuel J. Palmer. By that time, it was no longer referenced as Jamestown, but was known as Mount Moriah.

Ravenel, writing in 1900, stated, “There are no remains of the Town. The site of the Church is known and near it were graves which are remembered, but many are now obliterated.” In 1931, the Huguenot Society of South Carolina commemorated the St. James Church site at Jamestown by erecting a granite Cross. Similar crosses (three of which are in Berkeley County) were erected on other Huguenot Church sites at other South Carolina settlements.

The Church at Jamestown was declared the Parish Church of St. James Santee, quite probably built between April 1706 and December 1706, and it functioned as Parish Church until May 11, 1754. It was a wooden building on a brick foundation.

The French Santee settlement contained the largest unadulterated concentration of any of the French Huguenot settlements in South Carolina. During the early eighteenth century, Jamestown was the commercial and religious secular center of this settlement. Historians have downplayed the role of this urban center in the history of South Carolina, yet the interpretation of Jamestown as a town that never materialized may be incorrect. Why was it abandoned? The archaeological remains of Jamestown are sparse, but they do serve to identify the location of the town. Could it be that with the energy and drive of these Huguenot families, their determination to succeed, continue to worship God, freely, their move up river to new land took them from Jamestown? The French presence in Colonial South Carolina was very important in the formation of the colony.

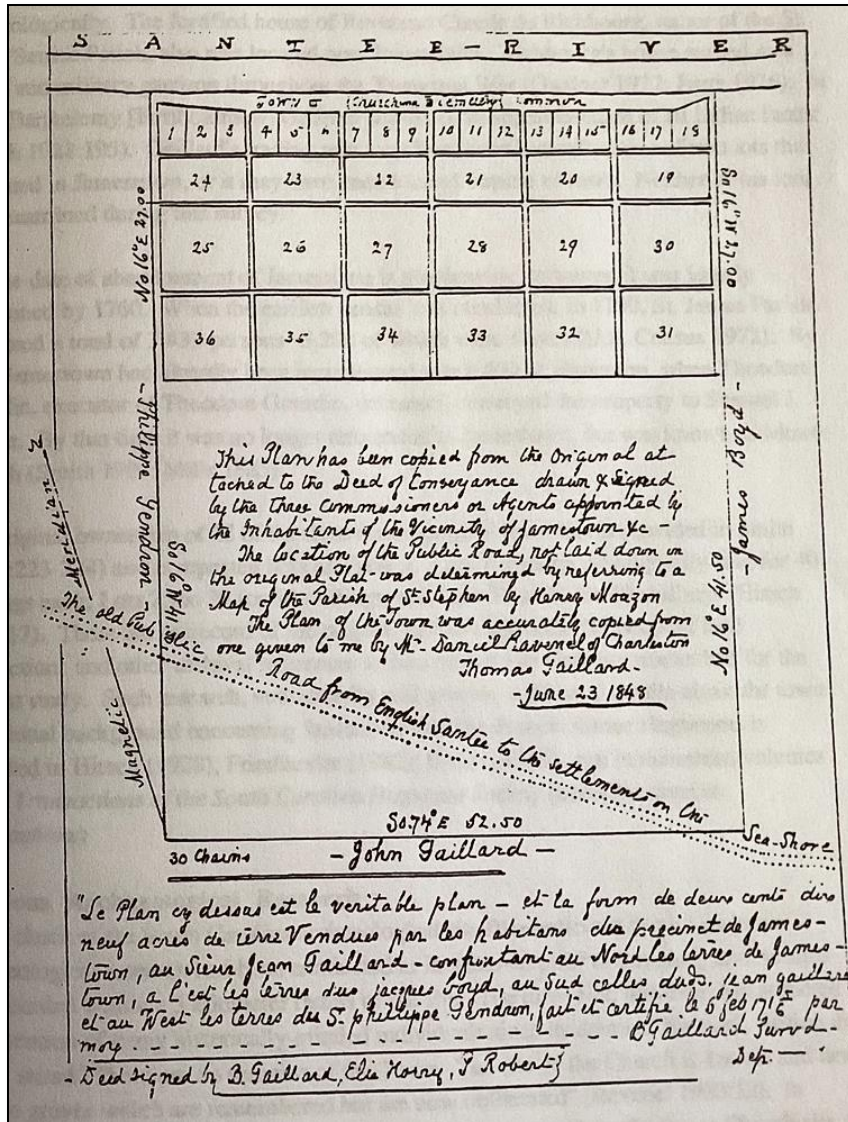
A good friend, Dr. Al Truesdale, in describing and defining the Huguenot, says this, and I love his in-depth statement: “Although pursuing wealth as an end in itself, or spontaneously enjoying one’s possessions, is reprehensible, obtaining wealth as a result of labor in one’s calling is a sign of God’s blessing, a sure confirmation of election. Here, in a theologically grounded asceticism, we encounter the dynamic that birthed capitalism as a rational deployment of capital. The Huguenots embodied and demonstrated this spirit. They and their fellow Calvinists had been brought to this place by a religion that taught them to ‘regard the pursuit of wealth as, not merely

as an advantage, but a duty'. A 'halo of sanctification' had been placed upon the pursuit of wealth." Van Ruymbeke recognizes that Huguenot settlers were "bent on securing as much wealth as possible in its least volatile form, namely, real estate." These St. James Santee' families, large as they were, I believe, seem to most assuredly have accomplished their tasks at hand . . . and surpassed their goals (though they may never have admitted it). To be continued . . .

Keith Gourdin

*References: Collections from Library of Keith Gourdin; Huguenots' Material Success, by Al Truesdale, PhD; Jamestown Reconnaissance Survey, by Lamar Institute, Inc.; and The Huguenot Crosses of South Carolina, by the Huguenot Society of South Carolina.*





Redrafted Plat by Thomas Gaillard,  
Originally drawn 1715/6 by Barthelemy Gaillard, Surveyor