Port Royal History Tour Site Summaries

Fish Haul Plantation

Colonel John Barnwell (AKA Tuscarora Jack buried at St. Helena Episcopal Church, Beaufort, SC) received a Royal Grant for 500 acres "bounding to the north on Port Royal Sound to the south on land not laid out, to the East on the Inlet and to the West on a small creek coming out of the said Sound" on December 10, 1717 (South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Royal Grants, volume 39, page 225). While the description is ambiguous, John Barnwell and his wife Martha sold a tract called Fish Hall to Edward Ellis on October 24, 1760 (Charleston County RMC, Deed Book YY, page 245). It seems likely that the Royal Grant was the beginning of Fish Hall Plantation and that the tract passed from Colonel John Barnwell to his son, John Barnwell.

Between the Colonial period and the early antebellum period, however, virtually nothing is currently known of the Fish Hall tract. Thomas F. Drayton married Catherine Emma Pope, the only daughter of John Edward and Mary Baynard Pope, on February 28, 1838. Drayton apparently left his Bluffton plantation, Rephaim, at that time, although he continued to plant it, and resided with his wife at her mother's plantation, known as Fish Hall.

Slave Cabin Chimneys

Drayton was the commander of the Confederate forces defending Hilton Head Island in 1861 and it is likely that he left the island with the remainder of the Confederate troops after the Union attack on November 7, 1861. Drayton's plantation is shown on the November 1861 map entitled, "Map of the Country Surrounding Port Royal" (National Archives, Record Group 77, Map I 28-1). This map shows the main house, a variety of support structures clustered around the house, and a double slave row with seven houses to the north of the entrance road and six to the south. Drayton's Fish Hall Plantation was only one of 26 recognized and confiscated by the Federal government on Hilton Head.

Of greatest importance to these investigations, however, is a single photograph of the Fish Hall slave row, taken in 1862, from the southwestern end of the row looking toward the main house at a slight angle (U.S. Army Military History Institute, Massachusetts Commander Military Order of the Loyal Legion, Vol. 26, page 1283; Figure 4). While this photograph will be referenced at length in the following architectural discussions, it also provides information on intra-site patterning and refuse disposal practices. The double slave row is separated by a relatively wide street, estimated to be about 70 to 80 feet. The structures to the left (northwest) of the photograph appear to be older than those to the right (southeast), based on their condition and the size of the trees planted on each side of the row. As Brooker will discuss, it is clear that these structures represent at least two distinct construction episodes. The structures are not evenly spaced and there is evidence for at least one gap in the northwest row. The yard area is relatively clean, although on the northwest side there are at least two large shell
middens located between and toward the front of structures. While there may be one midden on the southeast in the background, this cannot be conclusively demonstrated. The absence of middens on the southeast may be related to their more recent construction. The photograph also illustrates a number of vertical stick fences attached to individual structures. These may represent pens or

**Drayton Cemetery**

An undated document on military cemeteries indicated that a "small pox cemetery" is located "325 yds North West of the Drayton Plantation House." The document reveals that the cemetery was not at that time enclosed, but contained at least 31 bodies, 11 of which were marked with boards and could be identified. The cemetery was still in use and Captain Charles Barnard stated, "I would most respectfully request that this cemetery remain in use, as the bodies cannot be moved without danger of breeding contagion" (National Archives, Record Group 92, Office of the Quartermaster General Consolidated Correspondence File, Box 402). It seems likely that the cemetery today known as "Drayton's Cemetery" may be the remains of this military plot, rather than a pre-existing slave cemetery, although its use into the postbellum clearly included freedmen.
Cherry Hill School

The Cherry Hill School, built ca. 1937, is significant as a building associated with the development of African-American education during segregation in South Carolina. The school operated until all African-American children attended the new consolidated elementary school in 1954. The community that organized, purchased the property, built, helped maintain, and attended the school was comprised of the descendants of the former-slave town of Mitchelville, the first community to mandate education in the South. At the time of construction of the Cherry Hill School, the island was still an isolated, largely undeveloped, unincorporated portion of Beaufort County. The Cherry Hill School is the first and only freestanding, purpose-built schoolhouse for African-American children on Hilton Head Island. When the Cherry Hill School was built, there were three other black elementary schools in privately owned buildings serving the various black neighborhoods on Hilton Head Island. However, none met in buildings specifically built as schools. The Cherry Hill School had the smallest enrollment of the black elementary schools on the island. The number of children enrolled specifically in the Cherry Hill School numbered from 27-32, with one teacher. The building is a simple, gable-front rectangular one-room frame and weatherboard-sided schoolhouse on an open brick-pier foundation. The interior remains much as it did when the building opened. While the building was a public elementary school from 1937 to 1954 it was owned by the Beaufort County School District. The St. James Baptist Church purchased the school in 1956. The church extended and renovated the building in 1984. Listed in the National Register November 21, 2012.

Jerre Weckhorst's Hilton Head home modeled after the house that Union Gen. Ormsby Mitchel lived in during the Civil War

Back in the 1980s, Weckhorst stumbled across a photo of the home of Mitchelville's namesake and founder, General Ormsby Mitchel.

Jerre Weckhorst is photographed in his Hilton Head Island home, which is a replica of the home that Gen. Ormsby M. Mitchel (Mitchelville's namesake) lived in during the Union occupation of Hilton Head in the Civil War. Weckhorst also has a big collection of Mitchelville artifacts that he's found on his property, which is located next to Fish Haul Park. (Jay Karr/Staff photo)
Weckhorst, a boat builder by trade, was curious to see if he could replicate the house that long ago had been torn down.

The result: a replica house he built by hand. The only differences, he said, are a slightly different angle to the roof and a hand rail along the wrap-around porch.

The MPP wanted to buy the home and use it as a spot for displaying Mitchelville materials. Weckhorst agreed to the sale.

It is in Mitchelville after all. And every time it rains at the house, history is unearthed. Just this month, Jerre and his wife, Nanci, have found old nails, bits of plates and other Mitchelville bits in their driveway, uncovered by the rain.

Jerre Weckhorst's Hilton Head Island home is modeled after the house that Union Gen. Ormsby M. Mitchel (Mitchelville's namesake) lived in during the Civil War. (Jay Karr/Staff photo)

Inside the home, two display cases are nearly overflowing with old door knobs, buttons, belt buckles, hairbrush backs, harmonica parts and other pieces of Mitchelville.

But money earmarked for the sale in the state's budget in 2012 was stripped out. And talks with Beaufort County to buy the property have stalled.

Jerre and Nanci Weckhorst recently retired and are now dreaming of buying a house on the May River where they could fish everyday. Maybe they would consider selling to someone other than the Mitchelville group, Jerre Weckhorst recently said.

If that happens, it would be another setback for telling Mitchelville's story.

But it wouldn't be insurmountable, Dolyniuk said. The organization is long used to switching courses and looking for new ways to tell the Mitchelville story.

"Weckhorst's property is just one of many opportunities, albeit a good one, for our community to consider," he said. "We will continue to be thoughtful and develop sustainable plans in this journey."

Taken from Beaufortgazette.com June 14, 2015
**Fort Howell**

*Fort Howell*, named in honor of Brigadier General Joshua B. Howell, is located on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. Its primary function was to protect Mitchelville, a freedmen's town located to its east.[2][3] It was named to the National Register of Historic Places on June 15, 2011.[1] It is an earthworks fort built in 1864 during the American Civil War by the 32nd United States Colored Infantry Regiment (Union) from Pennsylvania. The fort covers approximately 3 acres of land once part of the plantation of William Pope.[4] Today, it is an historic site that is open to the public.

**Port Royal Plantation**

As you enter the Plantation, its main road, Coggins Point Road, was named for the 800 acre plantation, Coggins Point, that was part of a 1762 royal grant, and which through subsequent purchases and marriages created both the Fish Haul and Grasslawn Plantations. Incidentally, the name "Coggins Point", originally spelled "Colginse Point", is believed to have been named for a promontory in Virginia where the Pope family had resided earlier. This was the era of plantations, populated mostly by slaves and overseers, and the growing of indigo, rice, sugar cane, and Sea Island cotton. The period lasted about 100 years until the Civil War brought Union forces ashore in November 1861, and the establishment of major military and naval headquarters in what is now Port Royal Plantation. Military control ended in 1868 although the US government retained ownership of 803 acres of our area until 1927. Following the military's departure and for the next 80-90 years, the island was mostly inhabited by a small population of freed slaves and other black families who farmed and fished the land and surrounding waters. During the latter part of this "quiet" period, the abundant game on the island began to attract hunters, both local and from afar. Then, post-World War II and the early 1950's came the lumbermen and developers, and as they say, the rest is history.

**FORT SHERMAN**

Completed in early 1862, this 14 acre earthen fort was built to protect the large Union encampment at Fort Walker/Welles with its military and naval headquarters. Later, Forts Mitchel and Howell were built to the north so as to complete a five mile defensive line on the island; all to guard against Confederate forces attacking from the mainland via Skull Creek as well as to
protect the ex-slaves or other freedmen residing nearby. These forts were basically heavy logs driven into the sandy soil, boarded across by planks from newly constructed Union sawmills at Fort Walker/Welles, and then earth and sand piled high on top. This construction created moats in front of the barricaded walls and soon filled with water diverted from nearby lagoons and creeks. They quickly became unhealthy sites themselves with mosquitos, snakes, frogs, alligators as well as a breeding area for many semi-tropical diseases.

Fort Sherman was named for Brig. Gen. Thomas West Sherman. Gen. Sherman, unrelated to Gen. Wm. Tecumseh Sherman, arrived on the island November 7, 1861 as the first commander of the Union’s Department of the South. He considered his primary mission was to fortify the island, and while he occupied Beaufort and Port Royal Island, Sherman made few other offensive moves against the CSA and so was reassigned to Ohio six months after arriving here. The press of the time referred to him as “pick and shovel” soldier.

**FORT WALKER**
The fort was hastily built beginning in July 1861 when SC Governor Pickens ordered forts to be built on opposite sides of Port Royal Sound. Both were mostly built by slaves requisitioned from local plantations but not quite finished when the Battle of Port Royal took place November 7, 1861 at Fort Walker. At that time, it was garrisoned by approximately 1800 CSA troops with 26 muzzle-loading 10 inch Columbiad cannon.

The Union attack that day was the earliest amphibious operations of the Civil War and largest by any US military force until World War II. The Union fleet of 77 vessels comprised of 25 coal/ammo transports, 33 troop/supply ships including 1500 horses, and 19 warships had sailed from Norfolk in late October 1861 with the intent to occupy the hastily-built Confederate Forts Walker (named for the CSA’s first Secretary of War, Leroy Pope Walker) on Hilton Head and Beauregard on the northern shore at Bay Point Island. Once landed at Fort Walker (later named Fort Welles by the Union after the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles) it would become the command base for the Navy’s South Atlantic Blockading Squadron and the Army’s Department of the South. The bases were garrisoned by some 15,000 Army, Navy, and Marine forces throughout the War plus a civilian population that reached 30,000 at times.
The battle began at 9:26am on November 7, 1861 with fire from Fort Walker on a Union recon boat. Soon Union warships sailed into Port Royal Sound firing the first salvos at Fort Beauregard on the northern shore and then Fort Walker to the south. This Union firing strategy continued with some variation throughout the morning, and later became known as the "Circle of Fire". A cease fire was declared by Commodore Samuel DuPont, the Navy commander at 2:45 pm after it became apparent Fort Walker had been abandoned. Total casualties numbered less than 100 with 8 Union deaths and 11 Confederate.

Union forces immediately came ashore and soon began construction of a Union supply/military base for its various commands. The encampment area stretched between Fort Walker/Welles and Fort Sherman in what is much of Port Royal Plantation today. Tent platforms, saw mills, hospital, shops, hotel, post office and pier were among the many structures built during the occupation period which ended in 1868, three years after the war was over. During most of this period, some 45,000 military, their families, shopkeepers, teachers, missionaries, freed slaves, and others lived in this area the military had designated as "Port Royal-Hilton Head".

There are several historical markers and photos located throughout the Fort Walker site. Be sure to visit the Drayton Brothers monument, notable because of two South Carolinian brothers, Gen. Thomas Drayton, a graduate of West Point who led the CSA forces at Fort Walker and Cmdr. Percival Drayton, a graduate of Annapolis who had command of the USS Pocahontas, a gunboat in the Union invasion fleet, a sign pointing to the last remnants of the fort as well as a schematic of the Union encampment and a story/diagram in color of the Battle itself.

**THE HEADLANDS** of Hilton Head were first designated an historic site by the Hilton Head Historical Society in 1963 to mark the tercentennial year of the sighting of the island by Captain William Hilton. The site represents a prominent landmark used by mariners during the voyages of Spanish and French explorers in the 1500's. Only after the 1663 voyage by Captain Hilton sailing aboard Adventure from Barbados to explore possible royal land grants by the British crown along the coast of the Carolinas did the name he gave it "Hilton's Head" prevail. It eventually became just Hilton Head. The Spanish earlier had called the island "Isla de los Osos" and the French "Ile de La Riviere Grande". It was
also known briefly as "Trench's Island", an owner's land broker during the early 1700’s. It was during this period when English colonists and planters begin in earnest the era of sea island plantations and crop growing.

**STEAM GUN.** Officially the site was named "The 15 inch Pneumatic Dynamite Gun Plant at Hilton Head SC" but a more popular name has been the Steam Gun. Our site was one of four land-based gun plants in the USA......the others being Sandy Hook NJ, San Francisco, and Fisher’s Island NY...... while other guns were placed aboard two US Navy ships. Construction of our gun site began in 1897 and was completed in 1901 when the gun was first fired. While there is some dispute as to how many times it was fired, it was mostly verified as being about 100 times. The maximum firing range with dynamite-loaded projectiles weighing up to 576 lbs. was slightly more than three miles.

The gun with a 15 inch bore and a barrel length of 50 feet fired a seven foot long projectile. It used a simple steam generator to provide electricity for powering the gun's positioning motors, and the air compressors to produce air stored at 2,000 psi. Firing resulted in little shock, no heat and low pressures, thereby preventing the dynamite charge from exploding prematurely before reaching the target.

Dynamite which was much more destructive than the then available gunpowder could not be fired by conventional cannon as the heat and shock of the launch caused the dynamite to explode in the barrel. As a result, pneumatic firing of a dynamite charge offered advantages over a gunpowder launch. What made the made the dynamite gun obsolete almost immediately was the development of new high explosives such as Dunnite (ammonium picrate) which heat and shock did not affect. Our gun was sold for scrap in 1904 although its concrete and brick foundations remain. A schematic diagram is located at the site.