

The Altamaha Echoes

The Lower Altamaha Historical Society

September 18, 1986 P. O. Box 1405, Darien, Georgia 31305 Vol. I, No. 2

FORT KING GEORGE—THE CATALYST

THE establishment of Fort King George in 1721 set the stage for the founding of the Colony of Georgia. It was the first link in the chain of British frontier forts and its presence, despite the Fort's relatively small size, prevented the French from dominating the Altamaha River Basin.

Later, the departure of the garrison and abandonment of this fortified strong-point on the Altamaha River created a power vacuum such that expedient action was necessary to preclude further enemy depredations. The alarmed S. Carolina Council agreed to relinquish all claims to the lands between the Savannah and Altamaha Rivers in return for a buffer zone between themselves and the Spanish at St. Augustine. This area was also coveted by the British. Speculators, philanthropists and missionary societies were describing it as "the most delightful country in the Universe" offering innumerable opportunities, especially to those who were victims of unfortunate circumstances. In London interested groups coalesced into a Board of Trustees composed of prominent gentlemen, clergy and members of Parliament, anti-slavery in sentiment and anxious to obtain the British Government's consent to the establishment of a "Colony of Georgia in America." The Government agreed to the "Georgia Experiment" and granted the Trustees a charter to "those lands south of the Savannah River" for their Georgia Colony, for they realized that settlers would defend themselves from any attack and thereby preserve the territory for the Crown at little or no expense to the British Government.

Today, no trace remains above ground of Fort King George. Nothing to tell of its critical eighteenth century role in maintaining the territorial balance between rival empires. However, Fort King George symbolizes the true beginnings of Georgia. Symbols are powerful tools. The Statue of Liberty's renewal focused the Nation's sentiments on the ideals of Liberty and their role in American history. The State of Georgia could focus attention upon Fort King George as a symbol of the determination of its people that produced the Colony and later the State of Georgia. A visible, tangible Fort, a facsimile of the original, would powerfully stimulate people's imagination and pride in the State of Georgia and enhance a national understanding of this area's unique history.

The Lower Altamaha Historical Society, since its inception, has recognized the initial importance of Fort King George's role in Georgia's history and in the history of the nation. L. A. H. S. believes that the time has come to capitalize on the Fort's symbolic value. The Society seeks your support, and that of the State of Georgia, for a concerted effort to upgrade Fort King George as a true historic site.

[CELEBRATING the 250th year of the first Scots Highlanders settlement at Darien, Fort King George Historic Site is hosting a variety of special programs in 1986.]

Admission \$1.00 for adults, .50 for children under 12, under 6 free. Group rates available. For more information call 912-437-4770.

OLD FAMILIES OF McINTOSH COUNTY—1.

"Never move away from this coast because you won't starve here," was Mrs. Meta Watson's advice to her children as they grew up in McIntosh County in the early 1900s. Her father, John McIntosh Atwood, taught his large family equally deep allegiance to the area but for different reasons; he knew that children might leave temporarily but that they would always need to return to "smell the marshes."

John McIntosh Atwood had cause to know this: his forebears had lived along the McIntosh County coastline since their patriarch, John McIntosh "Mohr," had stepped ashore from the vessel *Prince of Wales* in 1736 to found Darien. Today, more than two dozen County residents, tracing their ancestry to John McIntosh 'Mohr' through Ann McIntosh, still live on or near the same lands accorded their ancestors by King's Grant.

This family's fortunes were long centred on land, both in McIntosh County (along the coast from Cedar Point south towards the Ridge) and in middle Georgia. Ann McIntosh married New Englander Henry Atwood in 1824 and lived on her plantations in Putnam County. Family history relates that she would go to the slave market at Lewisville, Georgia, and to the coast to purchase the slaves remaining until last on the block through poor health or physique, and would nurse them back to good health. Reputedly, Ann was the largest slave owner in Georgia but freed her slaves well before the Civil War.

Ann's five sons lived on the family properties (Clark's Bluff, Manchester South, Cedar Springs, Shell Bluff, and Baywood) in McIntosh County after the Civil War, which had seen them officers in the cavalry upon graduation from the Georgia Military College at Milledgeville. These Atwood sons, Alfred, Henry, James, John McIntosh and his twin brother, George Eliot, cultivated cotton, corn, oats, livestock and timber. Hazzard's Dock (in present-day Valona) was a shipping point for their lumber, by Mr. Hazzard's store. John McIntosh Atwood also owned a commissary near the Crescent railroad station. His supply boat, captained by Frank Durant, would return from Savannah laden with barrel of flour, whiskey or even blocks of ice. These were kept in saw-dust lined holes in the ground during the winter; melons occupied the same storage holes during summer.

With land practically worthless after the Civil War, the N. Georgia properties passed out the family, with 17 lots in Atlanta (now the Five Points-Whitehall area) being gambled away in a poker game by two Atwood sons. The coast began to loom larger in the family fortunes and ultimately, seafood saved the remnants of the properties after the depression. James Atwood, who owned the land where King Shrimp Co. now stands in Valona, advertised for help and went into canning oysters and shrimp. Henry Atwood started another oyster canning plant at Cedar Point, while Hugh Atwood Burrows, John Atwood's grandson, was one of the first commercial fishermen in the area. At his death, the State of Georgia published a commendation citing his pioneering efforts in trucking seafood to Baltimore and further north.

Hugh's half brother, Hunter Watson, an expert shrimpboat builder and shrimper, also experimented with transporting shrimp by boat to northern markets. A trip he made with Frank Hanneberger ended in disaster on the return voyage and incidently confirmed his mother's psychic powers. Long before there was any intimation of bad weather, Mrs. Watson had phoned the Charleston Coast Guard to ask them to watch for a little white shrimp boat in trouble. Eventually convinced, the Coast Guard put to sea in the USS *Yamacraw* and indeed found the boat in distress. It was two days

before the heavy seas subsided sufficiently for Hunter, Frank and the crew to be rescued after many a dramatic moment.

By 1930s, shrimping had become a way of life for many of Ann McIntosh's descendants and their fortunes have mirrored the evolution of America's seafood industry. Behind such endeavours, however, remains this deep emotional tie to their forefathers' lands on which many of them live. As Mrs. Gay Jacobs said, reflecting upon her family's 250 years in McIntosh County, "We're the tenacious ones—we stayed here while other family members went elsewhere."

With acknowledgement and warm thanks to: Mrs. Lewis Graham, Mrs. Perry Saunders and Mrs. Gay Jacobs.

BOOK REVIEW

Tide Craft. The Boats of Lower South Carolina and Georgia: 1650-1950.

Rusty Fleetwood. Published by Coastal Heritage Society, Ft. Jackson, Savannah; 1982. 210 pp. Illustrated, extensive bibliography.

Living in McIntosh County affords memories of lumber craft coming down the Altamaha River and a constant presence of shrimp trawlers, small boats and batcaux. Curiosity about the origins and history of these Georgia watercraft is rewarded by *TIDECRAFT*, a book published in 1982 but well-worth seeking out.

As the author states in his Prologue: "To tell the story of this region (from Charleston, South Carolina, to Jacksonville, Florida), it is necessary to tell of boats. Not necessarily fancy or large craft, just plain, get-from-here-to-there boats that could live with the mud, the oyster racks, the narrow creeks, and the short choppy seas of the sounds and would be simple cheap to build and operate..."

Tracing the history of boats from early Indian times onwards, Mr. Fleetwood unfolds the story of Coastal Georgia, for travel in this region has been essentially on the

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"Altamaha Echoes"

Editor: Mrs. Jeannine Cook; 912-832-4606
Printed at the Ashantully Press

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rivers and coastal waters. Mastery of the inland passages became a vital aspect of the struggle between France, Spain and England for early settlers depended upon boats and ships "to transport trade goods, secure and explore surrounding areas, protect themselves from enemy incursions by water and escape if need be."

Mr. Fleetwood takes the reader through the development of the local larger ship building industry from the 1700s onwards, whilst emphasising the vital role smaller dugouts, peraguas, canoes ("Trus-me-Gawds" in Gullah) and later bateaux played in coastal life. Fortunes ebbed and flowed in rice and cotton plantation eras, wartimes, fishing, shrimping and oystering seasons, and for each period, the demands for different types of boats are clearly discernable. Plantation racing canoes demonstrate eloquently these affluent, stable times; yacht regattas tell a similar story of the area's resurgence, mainly thanks to the timber and phosphate industries, in the 1880s-1890s. The fortunes of the first steam-powered boat built in 1790 in Savannah, the story of the *Hunley*, the first submarine ever to sink an enemy warship (off Charleston in 1864), the revolution brought about by the internal combustion engine from 1900 onwards, especially in the shrimping industry... These are but a small sampling of the book's fascinating contents.

FUTURE PROGRAMMES

7:30 p. m. on the 3rd Thursday, at the Courthouse, Darien

Sept. 18th, 1986: Mr. Ken Akins, Superintendent of Fort King George Historic Site, will give an illustrated talk on the Site's history and future plans.

Oct. 3rd or 4th: Dr. David Hurst Thomas of the American Museum of Natural History in New York and Director of the Santa Catalina de Guale excavations on St. Catherine's Island will discuss the latest important discoveries on St. Catherine's and give a guided tour of Fort King George, postulated site of an early Spanish mission. Please contact Ft. King George at tel. 437-4770 for final date and time of Dr. Thomas's visit, or check the Darien News for LAHS announcement for that week.

Nov. 20th: Bill Rivers, Superintendent of Hofwyl Plantation, will give an illustrated talk on the cultivation of rice along the Georgia coast during the plantation era.

Dec. 18th: Susan Mason, Curator of Education of the Jekyll Island Authority Museum, will talk about Christmas customs in the South in the late 19th century.

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