

The Altamaha Echoes

The Lower Altamaha Historical Society

June 16, 1988 P. O. Box 1405, Darien, Georgia 31305 Vol. II, No. 3.

OGLETHORPE'S GIFT

A clipping from the "Darien News," August 13, 1970, says: "Plans For Squares Important to History of Our City." It drew attention to the asset Darien possesses in her system of squares. Noting, that to neglect them is to put them at forfeit to City Councilmen having thoughts of dividing the squares into lots for the tax benefits. It was a near thing on one occasion, and we owe the survival of the squares to the stalwart Councilwoman, Mrs. Frida Schmidt Stebbins, who battled stubbornly, saving Oglethorpe's legacy from extinction.

An appeal to Mr. Auverne d'Antignac, the District Engineer of the Georgia Dept. of Transportation, produced a crew to survey the squares. The first set of wooden markers quickly Disappeared and were replaced by four foot concrete markers with a metal core. These were sunk to their heads at each corner of the squares. Which insures the boundaries of the squares may easily be located.

It was a notably conceived plan for a town, and infinite are its possibilities for vistas and green oases. Rich is the city which has an inheritance of such a system of squares, the source of pride, and the envy of less fortunate cities, whose early planners had not this kind of sensitive vision.

Speculation over the source of Oglethorpe's plan of Savannah has stirred the imagination of many a theorist, going far afield as the great center square of Peking China. While others with orderly logic were convinced it was the product of the military mind, and refers us to Machiavelli's *Art of War*, with which Oglethorpe no doubt was familiar. The engraving illustrating a fortified military encampment, was sized upon as an example, with its troops, baggage, and material disposed neatly, separated by alleys and open spaces, that were interpreted as streets and squares, is well argued.

We do not have to search very far for a probable source of Oglethorpe's inspiration. When the Great Fire swept London, beginning Sept. 2nd, 1666, it raged for five days, destroying most of the old medieval city. The pressures exerted by a necessity of crisis proportions to rebuild, offered opportunity for gifted Renaissance men like Christopher Wren (who was not an architect, but a mathematician) to demonstrate their capabilities. Their response to this call was to transform the city with imposing structures in the Classical mode and in harmonious surroundings.

The intellectual activity of the day was centered largely in the study of the Greek and Latin authors. A well grounded knowledge of these was the mark of the educated man. It follows naturally that the ancient works of Athens and Rome were regarded as the epitome of achievement in the arts and sciences, and their architecture was studied with reverence. England was recovering from the internal strife of civil war, a devastating plague, and fire. Having suffered these ravages of the spirit, both physical and cultural, the effect of the visible stability of renewal going up on all sides was positive. The authoritative balance of the classical orders had appeal, and did satisfy to some extent that longing for relief from the turmoil of Man.

By Oglethorpe's time the idea of the classical proportions was fixed in the British mind. Adapted from Sirlio's and Paladio's reinterpretation of Vitruvius, (1st. century Roman architect), and was transformed by native genius and modified to suit the English temperament. It produced sufficient examples upon which to model the plan for Oglethorpe's Savannah. It so permeated the building trade that even the smallest cottage reflected that influence. It had progressed beyond fashion to become the soul of 18th century England. It dominated the architecture of British-America, and that well learned lesson would continue for well over a century and a half, deteriorating eventually, into a general fussiness in taste, that was far removed from its original simplicity.

Oglethorpe was the responsible leader, and representative of the authority of the Trustees' Board, of which he also was a member. His people had to be housed, and in a position to defend themselves. It was a military matter, and Oglethorpe set them to work building homes. By constituted authority he provided a plan, and supervised the laying out of their city. Whether Oglethorpe came prepared with a plan furnished him, or of his own devising during those tedious hours aboardship, or of the moment, it was the style he preferred. It was ready when the time came to use it. The manner of building its first city emphasizes the differences between Georgia and the other British colonies. It is consistent with the philanthropic Plan and Utopian ideals of the Trustees, to have the town built all at once, and not subject to the whims and vagaries of private enterprise, which was to come soon enough to challenge the authority of the Trustee's Board.

The genius of Oglethorpe's design is in its logic, yet flexibility. The motif of the unit with a square at its center retains the human scale of the small community. As other units are joined, there is the feeling of agreeable detachment within, while conscious of support by the surrounding group. The intervening streets are buffers, giving a variety that avoids monotony. Visualized, the plan is not unlike a highland tartan, a motif appropriate to Scottish Darien.

General Oglethorpe came to the Bluff of the Altamaha in highland dress of kilt and tartan to welcome and honor the military company of men recruited from Inverness, Scotland. He reviewed the company, and having chosen the site he proceeded to lay-out the streets of the town to be called Darien. Oglethorpe had only to lift a single square and its component of surrounding streets from his plan of Savannah, comprising a unit sufficient for Darien's small needs as a frontier post. But dignifying it in an orderly fashion, (by Edward Kimber's account of the original Darien). This he did also for Ebenezer. Bill Haynes. — To be continued

FORTS IN COASTAL GEORGIA

The series of brief sketches beginning in this issue of "Altamaha Echoes" is devoted to British Colonial and the later American fortifications, but it excludes the Spanish defenses of the 16th and 17th century Guale period of the Georgia coast.

The various fortifications of coastal Georgia have played a vital and significant role in the military affairs of the region. The forts date as far back as 1721 with the establishment of Fort King George near Darien. From that time onward, the forts were built along the coast on a regular basis, according to the needs of first, the British Crown, the American colonists and the U. S. government. The evolution of the fortifications is an enlightening study in developing military technology, especially in the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century in which the art of warfare was subject to almost constant change.

Fortunately, many of the forts in coastal Georgia, especially the 19th century structures, are in a fair state of preservation and are open to the public. All of the forts are within easy driving range of each other and are so situated that several may be visited in a single day's outing. These forts are open to the public under the auspices of either the U. S. Park Service or the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

FORT KING GEORGE, 1721—The fort was built by South Carolina Rangers under Colonel John Barnwell to serve as protection on South Carolina's southern flank against the incursions of French, Spanish, and Indians from northern Florida. The fort was built on the Altamaha riverbank (northern tributary) with a triangular earthwork and a moat on the landward side enclosing a three-story, gabled cypress blockhouse. Palisaded protection was located around the moat. Fire damaged the fort in 1726 and soon after, the garrison was withdrawn to Port Royal, S. C.

Buddy Sullivan— To be continued

ON FORT KING GEORGE, THE BLOCKHOUSE

As of mid-June, 1988, the construction of the blockhouse at Fort King George is right on schedule with about 60% of the work already completed. Just recently the channels (slots in the frame) were constructed and 4 inch cypress planks were slid in place. This construction technique long used in Europe, and it allowed the blockhouse to be taken apart and reassembled elsewhere if needed and makes the Fort King George blockhouse unique in its type of construction. ("Channels" were used to keep the vertically held plank siding in place in the thousand years old Stave Churches of Nor-

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way which gave the clue to Colonel John Barnwell's term for this unfamiliar builder's technique.)

Although visitors do not have access to the building as yet it is an incredible sight at the fort overlooking the Darien River. July 15 has been set for completion date on the cypress planking, and hopefully the blockhouse will be ready for opening to the public by the end of July. A formal dedication ceremony featuring dignitaries from around the world is slated for October 23rd. If you have not seen this impressive building the fort is open to the public 9 A. M. to 5 P. M. Tuesday through Saturday, 2 P. M. to 5:30 P. M. on Sunday, and open all Federal holidays.

The Blockhouse Fund Drive is closing in on the \$50,000. target but there is still \$7,200. to raise. A \$50. or more donation will allow your name to be put on a plaque that will be a part of the permanent history of the fort on display in the museum.

Kenneth M. Akins, Superintendent, Fort King George Historic Site

LAHS BLOCKHOUSE FUND: Please send donations (tax-deductible to the extent allowable by law) to: Mrs. Lillian Schaitberger, Treasurer, Lower Altamaha Historical Society, Box 691, Darien, Georgia. 31305.

MEETINGS OF LAHS are held at 7:30 p. m. on the 3rd Thursday, of every month at the Courthouse, Darien.

PROGRAM COMMITTEE

To draw upon wider resources, a committee was formed to plan the programs for the monthly meetings. Ken Akins, Bill Haynes, and Carolyn Hodges compose this committee. The programs are filled through the month of October, 1988.

FUTURE PROGRAMS

- June 16, 1988: Dr. Robert L. Gold, Executive Director—Historic St. Augustine Preservation Board will spend the evening of June 15 and the entire day June 16 familiarizing himself with the unique historical qualities of Darien and its environs. In the evening he will address himself to the ways in which he thinks the town and county can best preserve itself while dealing with the increased opportunities for local prosperity which are coming its way due to a growing interest in the area.
- July 21, Rober L. Humphries, E. P. A. Official—Devotee of the history of the coastal region. Topic, "Post Bellum Sapelo Island"
- August 18: Mrs Annie F. Gill LAHS member and local genealogist will share her research materials and their use in charting the interrelationships of North McIntosh County residents in our earliest days.
- September 15: Ms. Julie Negley - Bulloch Hall - Roswell, Georgia. She prepared the exhibit in Roswell's Allenbrook Museum, chronicling the life of Roswell King and his sons. As many persons from Darien, including the Rev. Francis Robert Goulding, followed the Kings to North Georgia years before the Civil War. It will be fascinating to learn what their futures brought after leaving here.
- October 20: Ms. Jane Landers - Doctoral Candidate, University of Florida. Historian for the archaeological dig at Fort Moosa where the Darien Scots were overrun by the Spanish and their black confederates in 1739. She hopes to bring an item or two which originated in Darien...the men of McIntosh seen from the other side.