

**History Commission Meeting
Tuesday, December 1, 2015
6:00 p.m.**

AGENDA

1. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag
2. A moment of silence
3. Old Business:
 - A. Outline of Procedures for Conducting History Commission Meeting
 - B. Proposed Submission to State Archives of the Application for an Historic Marker
4. New Business
 - A. Presentation of the Life of Simeon Pinckney
5. Summary
6. Adjourn

Simeon Pinckney – Laborer, Farmer, Land-owner

Mr. Simeon Pinckney acquired 20 acres of prime land on Ft. Johnson Road, James Island, South Carolina in approximately 1874. The property is just beyond what is now known as the Wild Life Refuge at the very eastern tip of Ft. Johnson Road, and across the street from a Catholic Convent which is set far back from Ft. Johnson Road and was established a very long time ago.

This presentation is based on the preliminary results of research necessary to comply with the criterion required for the approval of historical markers in the State of SC. In particular, this data concerns several aspects of Mr. Pinckney's life, specifically – where and when he was born, and what legal status he may have experienced at birth and during his childhood; where he may have spent his early years of life – who raised him, what was their legal status; what brought him to James Island – and how did he get here; and maybe, most importantly - how did he acquire his 20 acres of such beautiful and fertile land on James Island very soon following the end of the Civil War?

Various resource and primary sources have been consulted to begin to flesh out the answers to these questions – but the continued research efforts will greatly benefit from the collaborative support of the James Island History Commissioners – who may suggest additional questions to research, more keen resources to utilize, re-framing the inquiry's perspective – highlighting another approach to interpreting research data, and recommending additional history scholars with whom to consult for further pertinent information.

As the effort to research Mr. Simeon's life began – it was thought helpful to first contextualize the assumed period during which he was born and spent his childhood. One resource that proved very helpful was a book by the title: Bury me not in a land of slaves (Joyce Hansen; 2000, Franklin Watts/Grolier Publishers, NY.) Information on Mr. Simeon is at best very sketchy, and often contradictory. In terms of a familial resource – his great-grandson, Jerome Harris, who had inherited his great-grandfather's land - had little information to share about his ancestor. Literary sources indicate that Mr. Simeon was born sometime in the 1800's, most likely prior to the end of the slave era. We could assume that he was held in bondage – but we do not know that for certain – he could have been a free man, or once held in bondage – and then freed in his youth prior to emancipation as a whole. We did learn that he may have been born in Manning, S.C., and that he lived in Charleston before coming to James Island. The question remains – where did he spend his earliest years? According to Dr. John Hope Franklin... *“Cities in the Lower South tempted slaves away from plantations and farms. The most popular city along the eastern seaboard was Charleston and its surrounding suburbs. In any given year, ‘run-aways’ arrived from Georgia, from along the Savannah River, from plantations along the Cooper, Ashley, and South Santee Rivers. They also came from Fairfield District, above Columbia, from farms around Summerville and Wassamasaw, from plantations on Johns Island, St. Helena Island, Edisto Island, Fenwich Island, James Island and Goose Creek”*; (Runaway Slaves – Rebels on the Plantation; John Hope Franklin, and Loren Schweningen, 1994; Oxford University Press, NY.

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We learned from the U.S. Census of 1870 that Simeon Pinckney may have been 24 years of age when the census was taken, and was living in James Island, SC at that time. The Census Report also shared that he was...“unable to read or write, and in place of a signature he made an ‘X’.” We know that prior to the emancipation of all those held in bondage following the Civil War – the South in general relied on the free labor of those same non-free individuals who had provided their blood, sweat and tears to the enrichment of those who would own them – and their labor was the primary under-pining of the economy – we also know that cotton was the primary crop on most Southern plantations. We understand that those held in bondage – adults as well as their children – had no legal rights, and were considered sub-human property - much like oxen, cows, chickens, plows and other inanimate objects used for farming on the plantations. This was true even with regard to personal interactions and relationships – those held in bondage were not allowed the dignity of married life – nor could parents assume they would be allowed to do the most natural thing - raise their children to adulthood. Education – even the ability to learn to read and write – was generally denied to those held in bondage prior to the end of slavery...with few exceptions. One explanation for the rules against educating those held in bondage was that they were needed – even as very small children – in the cotton and tobacco fields – and had no time for classroom study. However, it seems more apparent that education loomed as the light to freedom – and that was not, to say the least, encouraged.

Those held in bondage were not allowed to own property in most Southern states. They also could not sue - couldn't appear nor testify in Courts, and were not allowed to leave the plantations without a pass.

A Means to an End...

Some of those held in bondage learned skills (carpentry, brick masonry, blacksmithing, horse training, leather tanning, sew/weaving/basket making, cooking, smoking and curing, farming, medical/herbal care and mid-wifery) and on some plantations were able to exchange their talents for a portion of what was earned – this proved to be a way to purchase their freedom...and many did. The chains that bound the precious cargo stolen from the African continent held fast for over two hundred years – broken only by the victory over this system that the Civil War represents...for some.

Still – we wonder – how and why did Simeon Pinckney come to James Island – where did he come from – how did he manage to acquire 20 acres of land?

The Freedman's Bureau...

In 1865 the U.S. Congress passed a Federal Bill establishing a government organization: The Freedman's Bureau. This organization was responsible for supervising the transition from an economic system dependent on free labor – to one that would become stabilized while paying laborers to continue working the farms, raising the produce, cotton, tobacco, fishing the seas, re-building the war-torn cities and plantations – and helping those formerly held in bondage by providing what is loosely known as “40 acres and a mule”. Is this how Simeon Pinckney got his land?

The Freedman's Bureau had responsibility divided into four dimensions:

1. restoring abandoned land; 2. developing and maintaining government documents such as property deeds, recording births, marriages, and deaths, organizing labor and laborers, developing schools, providing food rations, and building commissaries for supplies; 3. providing financial assistance whenever possible; and 4. providing medical attention to those in need. All of these responsibilities, according to the Congressional Bill – were to occur regardless of ethnicity.

Most of the tasks that the Freedman's Bureau was assigned responsibility for – had formerly been under the auspices of the U.S. Army – tasks such as making sure those formerly held in bondage but were now homeless – had refuge in the Federal Government camps and were provided meals, medical care, and opportunities to move into the work-force – and – most importantly - that they were paid for their labor – and paid adequately. These were the tasks outlined by the Federal Government...

Is this how Simeon Pinckney acquired his land? Did he live in a refuge camp following the Civil War? Did the Freedman's Bureau help him purchase his land – or was it some of the abandoned property that the Government helped him qualify for? Did he meet someone who gave him the land in exchange for his skill as a farmer or general laborer? We do know many of those who owned plantations were in ruins financially – and were forced to give away or sell much of their land – did Simeon Pinckney benefit in this way?

Why should Simeon Pinckney warrant a history marker bestowed by the Town of James Island?

What do we know about this man? Well we know he survived and overcame slavery – either as a free individual – or following his emancipation from enslavement. We know he had been afforded no education – and, therefore, could not write or read his name – but that didn't prevent him from acquiring land, farming it successfully, and helping others. We also know he was not a quitter - he did not give up – we know he was not only a successful farmer – but a laborer willing to work hard – evidence of which is the house he built and which is still standing over a hundred years later...and we know that he valued the land he owned and took good care of it, and that he eagerly shared it with those less fortunate than he. We have learned that he helped those who would have been homeless – and allowed them to live on his land, farm small sections in order to eat – and to raise money for the benefit of their family. One could definitely say that he was “a man of purpose”. We know he was a family loving individual, and that he understood that fathering was more than a biological relationship – as he took in children without parents – and raised them as his own. The land he acquired was precious to him – and he steadfastly took great care of it until his death in 1921. He appears to have been a remarkable and heroic man – a natural role model in his James Island community. The land he loved lies along the eastern end of what is called Fort Johnson Road, and is not far from the Fort that played a significant role in the Civil War – and also near the camp that was used to

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quarantine those newly arrived Africans with serious and contagious illnesses – which is now the area used for the protection and preservation of wildlife.

More research on his life – and accomplishments is warranted – and the help of other History Commissioners will be greatly appreciated.

Respectfully submitted,

Greg Brown Houch