

History Commission Agenda  
October 2, 2018

6:00 P.M. Meeting call to order

Welcome to visitors – introductions

Old Business:

- **Review Guide to Historic James Island Draft**
- Fort Johnson as a National Historical Site: **Draft of letter to Dr. Eric Emerson, SHPO**  
Department of Archives & History
- Status of efforts for participation in the Dec. 16, 2018 Victory Day Celebration by the Town of James Island: Motion passed by Town Council July 12, 2018

Victory Day – Approval of \$1,000 sponsorship, Contract to the Town, re: the sponsorship

JI HS ROTC: Boy/Girl Scouts participation

Ft. Johnson Flag

New Business:

- Draft letter to Dr. Eric Emerson, SHPO, Department of Archives & History

Notice of Upcoming Opportunity

Welcome Comments/ideas from visitors

Set next month meeting date

Meeting adjournment

# The Guide to Historic James Island

## Visit Historic James Island

James Island's history is America's history. Places associated with every major historical milestone can be found on the island.

People have lived on James Island for thousands of years. More than 3,000 years ago, American Indians hunted, fished, and raised families here. When the English arrived and established Charles Towne in 1670 and James Towne in 1671, the settlers met people living in small villages. The English traded tools, weapons, and clothes with local tribes for animal deer skins. By the early 1700s, the local population was decimated by disease and conflict.

James Island's first European settlers raised cattle and cut timber because these industries required little capital investment. Salted pork was shipped to plantations in the West Indies. The island's large oak trees were cut to make planks for ships and houses. As Carolina grew, settlers around Charleston and on James Island began farming. Enslaved Africans were imported into the colony to grow rice and indigo, and later Sea Island cotton. Because of its proximity to Charles Towne, hundreds of acres of vegetables were grown on James Island and transported into the town. By 1720, enslaved Africans made up most of the island's population.

In 1776, the 13 colonies declared their independence from Great Britain. Many people on James Island rallied to the Patriot cause. On June 28, 1776, patriots stationed at Fort Johnson helped defeat the mighty British Navy as they tried to take Charleston. In 1780, British General Sire Henry Clinton camped near the Wappoo Cut during the British siege of Charleston. Both Charleston and James Island were occupied by the British from 1780 until 1782.

The Civil War brought bloody battles and societal upheaval to James Island. The first shots of the war were fired on Fort Sumter by Confederate forces stationed at Fort Johnson. Governor Francis Pickens ordered Confederate General P.G.T. Beauregard to construct batteries around Charleston Harbor to defend the city. Beauregard's defenses were known as the *ring of fire*. Fortifications and batteries were built across James Island. These defenses helped keep Charleston in Confederate hands until the very end of the war.

Big changes came to James Island after the Civil War. Many of the island's large plantations were broken up and sold off because their white owners could not afford to operate them without slave labor. Newly emancipated African Americans purchased small parcels of land and established Freedmen's communities such Grimball and Sol Legare where they started their own farms.

As James Island moved into the 1900s, more changes came to the Island. It became less isolated as bridges were built spanning the rivers, making the trip to Charleston much easier. Families who once produced food for close neighbors or to sustain themselves were able to start growing produce on a

large scale. Truck farming became one of the island's biggest industries as millions of pounds of vegetables were grown and sold to local stores or shipped north in refrigerated rail cars. James Island became a desirable place to live and one of Charleston's earliest planned suburban neighborhoods was built on the island.

The Civil Rights Movement brought more equal treatment to the region, as schools, public institutions, and private businesses began the process of racial integration. This history is most visible in the educational history of the island and can be seen in the architecture of James Island History School and W. Gresham Meggett.

Today, James Island is a blend of rural landscapes, traditional neighborhoods, and new subdivisions nestled under the trees between the Wando and Stono rivers. The town has taken on the challenge of balancing preservation of historic cultural places and communities with the development of a thriving twenty-first century town.

## **Map of Sites**

Listing additional historic sites

Walking path of historic places

## **Prehistoric James Island**

People have lived in South Carolina for more than 10,000 years. Tribes such as the Wando, Sewee, Kiawah, Stono, Yemessee and Etiwan lived around Charleston Harbor.

### **Archaic Shell Rings**

Oyster Point to Parrot Point

On James Island you can find the remains of shell rings made by people more than 3,000 years ago.

Archaeologists investigated some of the shells rings and found pits for cooking meat and pieces of some of the oldest pottery in the United States.

\*National Register of Historic Places

## **Colonial James Town**

Few people lived on James Island in the late 1600s and early 1700s. They settled along the rivers and streams and used them to travel between the Island and Charleston.

### **Morris Island Light House**

View from Fort Lamar Heritage Preserve

The first lighthouse was built on Morris Island about 1767 by the Colony of South Carolina. It was one of the first light houses constructed on the East Coast. The black and white striped light house you see today was built about 1867. The light house is made of brick and is 150 feet tall. It was last used in 1962.

\*National Register of Historic Places

### **Stiles-Hinson House**

90 Paul Revere Drive

The Stiles-Hinson House is two houses built back to back. The first house was built in 1742 as the main house on a large plantation. The plantation was actively farmed until the early 1900s. The new side of the house was

built in the late 1800. It was constructed in a Victorian style and has high ceilings, a mansard roof and decorative wooden elements.

\*National Register of Historic Places

### Cuthbert-Heyward House

683 Fort Sumter Drive

This may be the oldest house still standing on James Island. It was built about 1740 for Hester Heyward, the widow of Captain Thomas Heyward. In the 1900s, the property became Lawton Dairy. By this time, the kitchen was attached to the house and a rear addition constructed. The porch roof, columns, and balustrade were built in the mid-1900s.

## Cross Hairs of the Revolution

The greater Charleston area played a central role in the fight for freedom against the British. Many prominent citizens supported the Patriot cause and fought to expel the British.

### Dills Bluff State Historic Marker

The Battle of Dills Bluff was the last engagement of the Revolutionary War. On November 14, 1782, a 70-man detachment of Patriot troops led by Colonel Thadeus Kozciusko attempted to ambush a work party of British troops. Unfortunately, the Americans had faulty intelligence and did not realize there were almost 300 British soldiers in the unit. The Patriots were able to fight them off and retreat. However, several Americans including Captain William Wilmot were killed. William Smith, an enslaved African American was captured and died from his wounds. These men were the last to die in the Revolutionary War.

### Fort Johnson

End of Fort Johnson Road

The first Fort Johnson was built about 1708. It was replaced by a new tabby fort in 1759, pieces of which are still visible. Patriot forces occupied the fort during the Battle of Sullivan's Island. They helped defeat the might British Navy when they tried to capture Charleston in 1776. During the Civil War, Confederate soldiers built new earthworks and installed four 10-inch mortars and three guns at the site. The first shots of the Civil War were fired from Fort Johnson onto Fort Sumter.

\*National Register of Historic Places

## The Young Country

From 1720 until 1865, the majority of James Island's residents were enslaved Africans. Early on they raised livestock, cut timber, and grew vegetables. In the 1750s indigo was the primary cash crop. After the American Revolution, indigo was replaced by Sea Island cotton. Thousands of enslaved people toiled on the island's 23 plantations to make their owners wealthy. Most of these plantations no longer exist.

### McLeod Plantation

325 Country Club Drive

The plantation house at McLeod was built in 1858. The six intact cabins lived in by enslaved people likely date to the same time. Many of the houses were occupied until the 1990s, when the McLeod family sold the property. During the Civil war, McLeod Plantation was used as a Union hospital and later as a Freedmen's Bureau office. Today, the property is part of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, a National Heritage Area.

\* National Register of Historic Places

### Grimball Plantation and Cemetery

Approximately 1870 South Grimball Road

The Grimball family began to acquire land on James Island in the early 1800s to grow Sea Island cotton and provisions. The family abandoned their property in 1862 but were able to acquire some of their land back after the Civil War. Evergreen Cemetery is located on former Grimball property and may contain unmarked graves of enslaved people who worked on Grimball Plantation. The cemetery is still used today.

### Marshlands Plantation House

Fort Johnson Road

The Marshlands Plantation House was built in 1810 on a site on the Cooper River. In 1961, it was moved to its current location. Very little else has changed for the Federal-style house. The interior floor plan and large piazza date from the original construction. It was built during the peak of rice production in the Lowcountry.

\*National Register of Historic Places

## Fiery Secession

Politicians and most of the free population supported the secession and the Confederate Army. The Confederate Army ferociously defended James Island to protect the Charleston Harbor. They left behind evidence of their fight. **STILL NEEDS WORK**

### Battery Cheves

R.E. Lee Boulevard

A battery is a fortification made of dirt. This battery was one of five Confederate earthworks built in the Summer and Fall of 1863 on the southeastern shore of James Island to defend Charleston. These batteries were built after Union forces took Folly Island and most of Morris Island.

\*National Register of Historic Places

### Battery Haskell

Schooner Road

The battery helped to defend Confederate-held Battery Wagner by shelling attacking Union forces during the Summer of 1863. It originally contained 12 artillery emplacements. Like other batteries of the period, Battery Haskell was named for a man killed in action during the fight for Morris Island. Captain C. T. Haskell, Jr. was killed in action on July 10, 1863.

\*National Register of Historic Places

### Fort Lamar Heritage Area and Secessionville Historic District

Fort Lamar Road

In June 1862, Union troops landed at Grimball Plantation and marched to attack the fortifications at Fort Lamar. The Confederate army defeated the Union army, causing heavy casualties. The Union retreated leaving behind many of their dead and wounded. The Secessionville Historic District includes the location of the Battle of Secessionville and surrounding homes that were once owned by prominent planters.

\*National Register of Historic Places

### Fort Pemberton

221 Yates Avenue

Fort Pemberton was a large five-sided Confederate earthwork and is unique in its design. It was completed in 1862 to stop the Union navy from accessing the Charleston Harbor. The fort was abandoned when Confederate forces retreated from Charleston, evacuating all defenses on February 17, 1865.

\*National Register of Historic Places

## **Reconstruction**

The defeat of the Confederacy ushered in an era of social and political upheaval. The South Carolina Constitution of 1868 enacted democratic reforms and allowed newly emancipated men to vote for the first time. When Federal reconstruction ended in 1877, there was violent political backlash that undid many of the reforms and began the era of Jim Crow segregation and discrimination.

**Pinckney Park**  
461 Fort Johnson Road

This park is named for Simeon Pinckney who once owned this property. He was enslaved until the Civil War when he enlisted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment South Carolina Volunteer Infantry (African Descent). They mustered at Hilton Head. After the war, in 1877, Pinckney purchased 20 acres on James Island and passed his property to his descendants. Much of the land continued to be owned by the family until they sold it to the city for use as a park.

**Sol Legare**  
Sol Legare Road

This vibrant African American community was established after the Civil War as formerly enslaved people worked to purchase property and farm their own land.

\*National Register of Historic Places

**Seashore Farmers Lodge**  
Sol Legare Road and Old Sol Legare Road

The lodge was built around 1915 as a community center and headquarters of the Seashore Farmers. This organization of local men band together to help provide for the community and protect against the unexpected hurricane, bad growing season, or sickness and injury.

\*National Register of Historic Places

**Mosquito Beach**  
Mosquito Beach Road

Before the 1950s, most of Charleston's beaches were segregated and only white people could visit them. Mosquito Beach offered African American families the opportunity to relax, cool off, and visit with friends and family at the local restaurants, dance hall, and pavilion.

\*\* Soon to be National Register of Historic Places

**Backman Seafood**  
1851 Sol Legare Road

Thomas Backman, who's grandparents were enslaved on James Island, opened Backman Seafood in the 1950s. This popular seafood spot endured for more than 50 years through hurricanes, declining fish populations and eager developers.

## **Towards a New Century**

World War II and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s brought more changes to James Island. Schools and businesses were integrated. New bridges brought increased population to the island.

**Riverland Terrace**  
North of Maybank Highway

Riverland Terrace was one of the first planned neighborhoods on James Island. Construction started in the 1920s using the most modern design trends including curvilinear street patterns, uniform housing setbacks, and driveways.

#### Avenue of Oaks

Fort Pemberton Drive

There are more than 70 of these grand oak trees that are over 100 years old. They were originally planted in the 1910s.

#### Elliot Constantine House

2037 Lake Shore Drive

This house was built in 1974 in a modern International architectural style. It features walls of glass, and simple, square roof and foundation lines. There are very few houses in this style in the Charleston area.

\*National Register of Historic Places eligible

### **Schools of James Island**

Public schools were rare in the South before the Civil War. The South Carolina Constitution of 1895 established the state's system of public education, creating separate schools for white and black children. South Carolina parents were instrumental in challenging "separate but equal" as part of the Brown v. Board of Education court decision.

#### James Island Grammar

Fort Johnson Road and Dills Bluff Road

The first public school was established on James Island in 1883 as James Island Grammar School. Initially, there were only 6 students, and the school only served white students. Riverland Terrace School was built in 1930 to serve white students.

#### Cut Bridge Elementary School

Riverland Drive at Camp Road

By 1888, there were three small schools on James Island for African American students: Cut Bridge, Society Corner and Three Trees School. Cut Bridge was a two-room school with a one-room cottage behind. It was built in the marsh and students would wade through the water at high-tide. In 1955, Cut Bridge was replaced by Murray LaSaine Elementary School.

#### W. Gresham Meggett High School

1929 Grimball Road

Meggett High School is an Equalization School. It was constructed as part of South Carolina's push to improve schools for African American children in an effort to avoid school integration. The high school brought higher education for African Americans to James Island for the first time. The new school building had modern amenities and taught a wide range of classes. The first class graduated in 1957.

\*National Register of Historic Places

### **Churches of James Island SHORTEN TO FOUR**

The leaders of the early Carolina colony, the Lords Proprietors, encouraged religious tolerance and settlers brought their religions with them. The first churches on James Island were built in the early 1700s. For more than 200 years, church has been central to the community.

### James Island Presbyterian Church and Burn Church Cemetery

1632 Fort Johnson Road

James Island Presbyterian church is one of the oldest churches on the island. The first building was constructed before 1724. Although the church was destroyed several times, the current building is more than 100 years old. It was built in 1908 in a Gothic-Revival style. The nearby cemetery, known as Burn Church Cemetery, is home to Samuel Smalls, the inspiration for Porgy in George Gershwin's musical, *Porgy and Bess*.

### Saint James Episcopal Church

1872 Camp Road

Saint James Episcopal Church is the oldest Anglican Church on the island. It was established in 1719 and has been rebuilt five times! It was destroyed by hurricane, fire, and war. The current building was constructed in 1960.

### Saint James Presbyterian Church

1314 Seccesionville Road

Before the Civil War, enslaved people could not worship freely without supervision. Saint James Presbyterian Church is the oldest church established by African Americans on James Island in 1866. After the Civil War, freedmen initially worshipped under tree on their property but eventually were able to build their own church.

### Payne Reformed Methodist United Episcopal Church

1560 Camp Road

Reconstruction brought some improvements in the lives of people who had formerly been enslaved. On the Seabrook Plantation, workers established a place to worship, and workers from nearby plantations joined them on Sundays. This informal group of worshipers became Payne RMUE in 1869 and built their first church building in 1875. The church was renovated in 1962.

## **Acknowledgements and Further Reading**

South Carolina National Register Sites

South Carolina Battlefield Trust

South Carolina Equalization Schools



07/20/18

Mr. Paul G. Hedden  
Chair, Town of James Island Historical Commission  
James Island, SC 29412

**Dr. Eric Emerson, SHPO**

Department of Archives & History  
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Sir:

The James Island Historical Commission began its mission of cataloging, presenting and promoting the significant history of James Island, South Carolina in February of 2015. There exists so much to the story of this small island that has played a role in European and colonial history; the Revolutionary War; the Antebellum period; the Civil War; Reconstruction, and on through the twentieth Century to today. This rich history is also multicultural.

In our short period of existence the Commission has been busy collecting and collating detailed information on the many events and places on James Island. In our review of one of our most important historical locations we have noted that Fort Johnson, though certainly not forgotten, has been neglected of late.

We were pleased to find Fort Johnson, or particular sections of the site, was included in the National Register of Historic Places. In the 1972 document two specific sites within Fort Johnson are cited: Marshlands Plantation House and the Fort Johnson Powder Magazine..

It has been noted the plaque on the Powder Magazine is in error. The text affixed to the building states the building to date from 1776 at the time of the Revolutionary War, in conjunction with Moultrie's victory at the Battle of Sullivan's Island. After examining a series of maps of Fort Johnson in The Property Nobody Wanted: Archaeological and Historical Investigations at Fort Johnson, SC, Research Series 43, Chicora Foundation, June 1994 the first time the structure definitively appears is on Figure 15, dating to 1800. (attached)

Other significant sites within the property of Fort Johnson are the First Shot Memorial, placed in 1960, and the remains of the earthworks constructed in early 1861 and originally designated the west battery, now better know as Battery Harleston. The history of the Fort goes back to early Colonial Days and has played a major role in the Revolutionary War. These and other matters of historical significance should be addressed. e.g. remains of the Martella Tower.

It is our hope that Fort Johnson's designation on the National Register of Historic Places could be updated,

Paul G. Hedden

Chair

Town of James Island Historical Commission.