

~ Yeamans Hall ~



This 1864 painting is the only known image of the original house built on the plantation of Sir John Yeamans. Union Private Robert Knox Sneden, the artist, was part of a Civil War prisoner exchange that took place at Charleston Harbor. Private Sneden's group was marched from the Confederate prison in Andersonville, Ga., and bivouacked at Yeaman's Plantation awaiting the exchange. The house was heavily damaged by the 1886 earthquake and was later destroyed by fire. But let's start a bit earlier, as to how "Yeamans Hall" and "Yeamans Hall Club" all came about.

Long ago, travelers were drawn to Charlestown by the stories of its charm, where the growths of the temperate zone and the sub-tropical climate flourished, a climate that knew no winter, they basked in Indian summer from autumn to spring.

John Yeamans was born in Bristol, England, in 1611, and later emigrated to the island of Barbados. He was the son of a brewer, who fought for the king during the English Civil War, rising to the rank of Colonel.

By some accounts, Yeamans was a rascal. By at least one account, when his Barbados land partner went back to England, he and the partner's wife, Margaret Berringer, had an affair. At least one account said that upon her husband's return from England, he learned of the affair and challenged Yeamans to a duel. Neither

man was killed, but Yeamans and Margaret escaped to the Carolinas, where, after a rather long and circuitous route beginning in Cape Fear, North Carolina, they eventually settled on the property in Hanahan. In spite of his reputed history, he gained favor with the Lord Proprietors of Carolina.

On town lots granted to Sir John Yeamans, he built a house, which stood until 1875, admired for its architecture and its carved paneling and painted ceilings. On the Back River, he maintained a great plantation home till he was made Governor of the Province, when he acquired Yeamans Hall, founding a family seat whose story is vivid in Charleston / Berkeley history to this day.

With him arrived Thomas Smith, a wealthy Englishman of Exeter (England), accompanied by a young wife whose beauty must have been extraordinary, for it remains a tradition yet today in Charleston, a city which has never lacked beautiful women of its own. He, too, became an American noble, being made Landgrave with “four baronies of twelve hundred acres each,” title and estates to descend forever to his heirs, a proviso which was fulfilled, for the hereditary title was borne by several of his descendants.

All along the tree-clad river shores of Yeamans Hall lay fleets of English sail to load cargoes of rice that made wealth for the landowner, limited only by the acreage that he might chose to plant. With thousands of acres granted to them, these lordly Carolina planters didn’t need to tear into their wilderness domains, leaving irregular shapes, acres of untamed forest between owners. From his house, the owner of Yeamans Hall looked out upon miles of such domain, gleaming the fingers of the salt river.

Pleasance and fairy gardens laid out by the generations of Landgraves have vanished. The war between the States ended the open-handed hospitalities of the rich, carefree, generous life. But two and a half centuries of kindly weather have nurtured and increased the forest that was ancient when Englishman and Indian fought for Carolina.

Around the ruins of the famous old house stood live oaks that were superb and famous hundreds of years ago. Those old evergreen giants meant only richness and mellowness. The dim trails under their draped branches led to river shores that offered undisturbed retreat to wildfowl as when the Indians pushed their dugout canoes along the tranquil reaches. Silver-gray curtains of Spanish moss hid the water-nooks as quaint and unspoiled as in the days when Marion’s men found refuge

around the headwaters of the Ashley and Cooper. The river shores bounded five miles of the northern and eastern parts of Yeamans Hall, teeming with rich history.

In the adjacent churchyard lie many of the descendants of the old Landgrave, Thomas Smith. The mansion of Yeamans Hall stood bravely, and as late as 1870, there still hung on its walls the frame that had held the portrait of his wife, our first 'Landgravine.' Charleston's legend is that during the Revolution, a British officer, enamored of her beauty, even on canvas, cut it out and carried it across the sea.

In the interest of saving time and space, here's a plantation timeline with dates and landowners:

- 1674 – Earliest known date of existence when Lady Margaret Yeamans, widow of Sir John Yeamans, received a 1,070-acre grant from the Lords Proprietors.
- 1674 – House built and was called Old Goose Creek
- 1677 – James Moore became owner. He was married to Margaret Berringer, Lady Yeamans daughter by a previous husband.
- 1694 – Thomas Smith became owner of the plantation. Smith increased the size of Yeamans Hall to 1,869 acres.
- 1695 – New brick house built by Landgrave Thomas Smith II
- 1738 – Henry Smith, Thomas Smith's oldest son, inherited the plantation upon his father's death.
- 1780 – Henry Smith passed away leaving Yeamans Hall to his son Thomas Smith.
- ? – Thomas Smith willed the plantation to his son George Henry Smith.
- ? – Yeamans Hall remained in the Smith family passing from George Henry Smith next to Thomas Henry Smith.
- ? – Yeamans Hall was purchased by Charleston Consortium, which was headed by R. Goodwyn Rhett.
- 1915 – Architects were hired to build a golf course on the plantation as the owners of Yeamans Hall wanted to turn it into a winter resort development.
- February 1926 – The golf course, Yeamans Hall Club, opened.
- 1920s – Another golf course and several buildings, including a club house and private cottages, were constructed by the Yeamans Hall Company.

Resources:

- A Day on Cooper River (1841), by John Beaufain Irving
- B. Earl Copeland, former Hanahan Mayor
- South Carolina Historical Society, 30-15 Plantation File
- www.south-carolina-plantations.com Yeamans Hall Plantation
- Yeamans Hall Club, 1924, by Yeamans Hall Club (a most thorough and interesting booklet found in the county library.)