

Interesting Bits About the Marions ~

While freshening my Francis Marion notes, I had the opportunity to review not only the history that has been recorded about him, but also a bit about what it meant to our ancestors who were strangers in a foreign land, who settled upon a rich soil, basically, covered woodland. There were no roads, only Indian paths and rivers. Can you imagine! No homes to go to after a day's work, & none of the luxuries we have today, like electricity. I read many descriptions as to the sufferings bore by both French and English . . . listen to one (*from Judith Manigault*):

“Since leaving France, we have experienced every kind of affliction, disease, pestilence, famine, poverty, and hard labor; I have been for six months together without tasting bread, working the ground like a slave. We cultivated the barren high lands, and at first naturally attempted to raise wheat, barley, and other European grains upon them, until better taught by the Indians. Men and their wives worked together in felling trees, building houses, making fences, and grubbing up the grounds, until settlements were formed; and afterwards, continuing their labors. Such was their industry, that in fourteen years after their first settlement, and according to the first certain account of them, they were in ‘prosperous’ circumstances.”

First comes Benjamin & Judith Marion of Poitou, France, who were French Calvinists (Huguenots*), who left their native country in the late 1680's. Benjamin and Judith and their eldest children, Esther and Gabriel, arrived in the colony first known as Carolina. Records show they were naturalized in 1696. (Benjamin and Judith eventually had six sons and five daughters.) Benjamin settled first on a portion of what is now known as the Oaks Plantation in Goose Creek Parish, with other French who didn't read or write English. Benjamin spoke a little English and wrote his will in French in 1725. (He died in 1735.) In 1705, we find Benjamin taking over a larger acreage in the Huger region in Quinby Barony that he called “the Marions.”

It was from here at “the Marion's” plantation that Gabriel Marion (1693 – 1747-'51), the second son of the emigrant, set out to win the hand of Esther Cordes, the talented and beautiful, eldest daughter of Dr. Antoine Cordes of Charles Town and Goatfield Plantation. (*Dr. Cordes' wife Esther Madeline Baluet was sister to Judith Baluet, who had married Benjamin Marion, thus Gabriel Marion married his first cousin.*) Gabriel and Esther married between the years of 1711 and 1716.

The Gabriel Marion's took over the operation of Goatfield Plantation. Gabriel wasn't much of a businessman and as a result, he found it very difficult providing for his family. He relied on his father, Benjamin, and his wife's brother, Thomas Cordes. Gabriel and Esther had six children: Esther, Isaac, Gabriel II, Benjamin III, Job, and the youngest, Francis.

Between the years 1733 and 1735, Gabriel and Esther moved to Georgetown for a time, hoping to improve himself at being a planter. Unfortunately, he failed to improve his vocation. (Francis was probably three or four y/o at this time.) So, Gabriel, his wife, his sons Gabriel II and Francis returned to Goatfield.

We all know the story of Francis, at the age of fifteen, joining a family friend in Georgetown named Joshua Lockwood, who owned a ship and crew. Francis went to sea with Joshua and determined, after almost losing his life, that this was not his choice of vocations. So, back to St. John's Parish he went.

Francis, being the youngest, didn't have much contact with his siblings, as they, being older, had left home and begun families of their own.

- Benjamin had moved to St. Thomas Parish;
- Isaac settled on Little River near the North Carolina line;
- Esther, at Georgetown's Winyah Bay;
- Job had married well to Elizabeth St. Julian, of St. John's Parish.
- Gabriel II had wooed and won the heiress, Catherine, daughter of Robert Taylor, and thus had become, by way of a wedding gift, the owner of the fine estate and beautiful residence of Robert Taylor, the original grantee of Belle Isle Plantation, in St. Stephen's Parish. Gabriel II became very wealthy, owning also Walnut Grove and Burnt Savanna. He was very generous and gave liberal assistance to his much poorer brother Francis.

Francis spent much of his early life getting to know every foot of Fairlawn Swamp, training to become quite a woodsman and hunter. Some historians, and many readers of the General, have wondered how and when Francis had acquired such battle strategy. Had they looked into the family history, they would have found that Elias Marion, Benjamin's brother (in France), was a Captain of the Camisades, a noble band of Protestants who refused to be run out of France. These Camisades' strategy was to attack at night or daybreak, when the enemy was asleep. Francis no doubt heard many stories about Captain Elias Marion and his friend Captain Rene

Ravenel, and how they had disappeared into the mountains to live and fight another day. I am fully convinced he learned from them, their experiences, and adapted these tactics to the woodlands, swamps and rivers he had become so accustomed to here in Carolina.

Francis and his mother moved and settled for one year on Frierson's (*this later became the location of #4 Lock on the old Santee Canal*). The following year, they moved to Belle Isle, in St. Stephen's Parish, where they lived and cultivated the portion called Burnt Savanna. This led to Francis learning all about the Santee River and its swamplands, and eventually, many years later, earned him the title "The Swamp Fox."

Francis wasn't much at socializing with others, and as a result, isn't known to have established many friendships outside his family. Oscar (*he later became Oscar [Buddy] Marion*), his childhood friend with whom he was raised, was no doubt his closest friend. Francis' health, as you will remember, started out very dim and doubtful, but around the age of twelve or so, had greatly improved. It is said that he was a quiet and passive youth, yet very thoughtful and compassionate, as history would later prove.

About 1756, Francis was purchasing adjoining tracts of land in St. John's Parish to enlarge what was later to become his Pond Bluff plantation (to a total of 1,452 acres).

Time passed; December 1780, Marion's Brigade was formed, and it was now 1782. His Brigade continued to be active throughout 1782, and Marion himself saw his last action in August 1782, at Fairlawn.

That same month, he returned home to Pond Bluff, after six long years of war with exemplary efforts of strategy, courage, and fortitude. He almost broke down at the sight of devastation wreaked upon his beloved home place. He could only round up seven of his twenty-five slaves. His large herds of cattle and pens of pigs were gone and his fields were a tangle of briars and weeds. There was no food and no money for rebuilding. General Marion gladly accepted a 400 pound per year stipend to command Fort Johnson (though he never did receive any compensation for his six years of war services.)

He had paid dearly for the fact that Pond Bluff was situated near Nelson's Ferry road, the main thoroughfare between Charleston and Camden. His place was within cannon shot of the Battle of Eutaw Springs.

Mary Esther Videau, Marion's cousin and prospective bride, was then living at Sussex, a part of Springbank Plantation, bordering Greenland Swamp. It has been whispered that she used some of her 195 slaves to hasten the renovation of her pending home, and thus an earlier sounding of wedding bells.

On April 20, 1786, Francis married his wealthy cousin, Mary Esther, and they settled at Pond Bluff. In 1790, he was a representative at the Constitutional Convention, where he voted for a federal union. In 1790, he also resigned his post at Fort Johnson. And after the state officially joined the union, Marion retired from public office and remained at Pond Bluff 'til his death on 27 February 1795. He was buried on his brother Gabriel's land, Belle Isle Plantation.

**The Huguenots became known for their violent criticisms of worship as performed in the Catholic Church, in particular the focus of ritual and what they viewed as an obsession with death and the dead. They believed the ritual, images, saints, pilgrimages, prayers, and hierarchy of the Catholic Church didn't help anyone toward redemption. They saw Christian faith as something to be expressed in a strict and godly life, in obedience to Biblical laws, out of gratitude for God's mercy.*

-End-

Compiled by Keith Gourdin, 2011

Additional Notes & Bits About the Marions ~

The monument erected to the General by his family, was a marble slab on a brick tomb, similar to that which survives at the grave of his widow. By 1889, a fallen tree had broken the slab. During the Tillman administration, the General Assembly made an appropriation for the granite monument, present today, that was unveiled on May 20, 1893.

Colonel Banastre Tarleton was sent to capture or kill Marion in November 1780. Tarleton and Marion were sharply contrasted in the popular mind. Tarleton was hated because he burned and destroyed homes and plantations and their supplies. Whereas Marion's men, when they requisitioned supplies (or destroyed them to keep them out of British hands) gave the owners receipts for them. Lt. Col. Tarleton was one of England's ablest cavalymen, and he had pursued Marion relentlessly, but could not catch him. After a 7-hour chase through 26 miles of swamp, he said, "But as for this damn old fox, the devil himself could not catch him." Thus, you have the name given to Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox."

One war story I really liked goes like this: British Colonel Watson sent a note to Marion complaining that neither he nor his sentries could cross a bridge or stand guard without being fired at by Marion's men. In his frustrations, Watson wrote, "Why, my God, sir, this is not the way that Christians ought to fight."

General Marion sent his answer to Colonel Watson to the effect that since Watson and his men had come three thousand miles from England to plunder and hang an innocent people, they should be the last to preach about honor and humanity and tell these innocent people how they should fight.

An Interesting Puzzle . . . yet unsolved

After considerable research, for many, many years, there is yet no resolve as to why there are no gravestones for any of Francis's brothers (Isaac, Benjamin, Gabriel, and Job). We know, generally, where they are buried, but no exact location can be found. We know, also, that each of these brothers (and their families) were not poor, actually, were probably considered wealthy, so it wasn't for lack that tombstones and/or markers that were not placed at their burial sites. We also know that all of them died

before Francis. Even Gabriel, whom Francis was closest, is buried there at Belle Isle, and yet no stone or marker for him either. Really . . . puzzling!

Another Bit About Belle Isle

In the very early 1900s, my Grandfather J.K. Gourdin and his brother, Clarence, owned and farmed Belle Isle Plantation, and, I have an old plat of Belle Isle, dated 1874, by John G. Gaillard, Surveyor, that had been redrawn from an earlier plat dated 1866. That area included 2,783 acres, of which 904 acres are Santee Swamp lands (“under bank”). The plat I have contains 389 acres.

What is historically interesting about this plat is that it shows the [Gabriel Marion] house as being at the most northern end of the plantation entrance drive (one mile in length) to the present-day Marion gravesite; where the turn-around is today. Also interesting is, before you get to the old house spot, on the east of the entrance drive, the plat shows an old church, as well as what appears to be a couple of little houses [quite probably houses for the enslaved].

Oscar (Buddy) Marion

As to the body servant of the General, who attended him always in the wars, the biographers give him the romantic or heroic name of Oscar; but we have ascertained from several family members, who well knew the faithful slave, that he bore the humbler name of “Buddy,” and in which no ‘Oscar’ is to be found. Buddy is an historical personage – the art of painting, too, has embalmed and immortalized him, as he figures prominently in Mr. J.B. White’s fine picture of Marion inviting the British officer to dine on sweet potatoes – and it is only right that he should go down to posterity with his true name. His mother, Chloe, died within fifteen years past, supposed to be about one hundred years old; and his sister Phoebe is (was) yet living, in extreme age, in St. John’s Berkeley, on the plantation of the widow of the late Francis Marion, grand-nephew, to whom all the negroes of the General, including Chloe, Buddy, and Phoebe, passed after the death of his widow. What the precise number of the days of the years of the pilgrimage of Phoebe is not known, but her daughter, Peggy, is (was) now in her seventy-third year; and the old woman and her descendants now number five generations. This story written by Richard Yeadon, *The Marion Family*, p. 219.