

Northampton Plantations, and the Marions ~

In Colonial times, South Carolina was organized with the parish as the local unit of government. Later several parishes were consolidated into a single county or district. Northampton was within the parish of St. Thomas and St. Denis, created by the Church Act of 1706. The parish acquired a dual name (St. Thomas and St. Denis) from the divided nature of its inhabitants, with half the parish being predominately Anglican (St. Thomas) and half being French Protestant (St. Denis). The church buildings that were erected served both religious and political purposes. The parish church as a public building was to be the center for the administration of local government in each parish, for at that time there was not a courthouse in the province, not even in Charleston. The St. Thomas and St. Denis church building was located along the upper reaches of the Wando River.

After the American Revolution ended in 1783, St. Thomas and St. Denis Parish was placed in Charleston District, which became Charleston County in 1868. In 1881, this section/part of Charleston County was detached and formed part of a new Berkeley County. Although the parish system has long since passed away as a political entity, it remains an important landmark in land records. Even down to the present day, land records in rural areas of the Lowcountry often mention the original parish as a point of reference. Land records for Berkeley County are (hopefully) complete dating to 1881 and are today located in the Berkeley County RMC Office in Moncks Corner.

Northampton has a long and rich history, dating back to the early eighteenth century, when the land produced abundant naval stores and tons of rice. In the mid-1700s, planters added indigo as a cash crop, and in the 1800s, short staple cotton. The plantation achieved its highest success in the early Federal Period (1783-1815) under the ownership of Edward Thomas. Remains of the rice fields in the inland swamps are clearly evident on many of the old tracts and plats, especially along Northampton and Harleston Dam creeks, all of which reveal the massive changes European planters and their African slaves forced on the land. (This is extremely evident on Halidon Hill Plantation [that I told you about in an earlier history story]).

Timber and naval stores, the earliest products of the land, remained a mainstay for revenue all the way into the early twentieth century. Eighteenth and nineteenth century tar kilns still dot the landscape, confirming the importance of this product to the residents.

Harvester's hand cut and removed logs from the swamps and forests using mule teams during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They were then loaded on small-gauge rail lines by steam-driven skidders and loaders and hauled to sawmills many miles away. By the 1930s, large sections of the region had been largely deforested.

In an effort to revitalize the area during the Great Depression, state officials led efforts to have a large portion of Berkeley County and northern Charleston County lands included in a new National Forest. Their efforts were successful and Northampton lands have been federally managed since the 1930s. Numerous logging roads and raised railroad trams or embankments reveal remnants of the logging period to the visitor. Many of the current National Forest roads and walking trails follow these old roads and railroad trams.

The name, Northampton Plantation, is a bit challenging to understand, because, there were three Northampton Plantations dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Therefore, we have to first determine 'which' Northampton Plantation we're talking about.

Let's first eliminate the third Northampton Plantation, which lies in Georgetown County, on the Sampit River. This plantation presents even greater confusion since it was named by the owner of our primary Northampton Plantation, Edward Thomas. In the 1790s, Thomas sold his St. Thomas and St. Denis Parish Northampton and moved north across the Santee River to the Georgetown District. There, he acquired rich, rice-growing lands along the Sampit River on a new plantation that he called "Northampton" . . . after his former home in St. Thomas and St. Denis Parish.

The second Northampton Plantation lies about fifteen miles northwest in old St. John's Berkeley Parish, also in Berkeley County. This plantation gained lasting fame as the home of General William Moultrie, the Revolutionary War hero. It was his country home and the location of his early experimentation with commercial cotton production in the 1790s. The house at Moultrie's plantation existed until 1941, when it was removed by South Carolina Public Service Authority. Today, Moultrie's Northampton lies under the waters of Lake Moultrie, four or five miles north of Moncks Corner.

Now, our primary Northampton Plantation: The southeastern section of what was to become Northampton was granted in two grants of 500 acres each: one to Landgrave Thomas Smith in 1691 and one to Landgrave John Bayley in 1698.

Neither of the latter grants are among existing records in the South Carolina Department of Archives & History. Research tells us it is unlikely that any of the grantees made any substantial changes to the land. Most passed the land to more aggressive owners/developers within a short time after their ownership.

By far, the largest early landowner in the vicinity of (our primary) Northampton was Benjamin Simons. In the early eighteenth century, he obtained a number of land grants in the area. In 1708/09, Simons obtained a Proprietary Grant for 1,000 acres on the west side of Northampton. In 1713 and 1717, Simons obtained two grants for 500 acres each, east of his earlier 1,000-acre grant. (During this same time, Samuel Burcham obtained two grants for 500 acres each that became the northernmost section of Northampton.)

Only ten days after securing the 1,000-acre grant, Benjamin Simons divided this land into two pieces, giving the southernmost 500 acres to his son Peter, and the northernmost 500 acres to his son Samuel. Peter Simons held his portion of the land until his death in 1724 when it descended to his son Peter Simons II. Only the portion given to Peter became part of Northampton.

Meanwhile, the northern half was passed by Samuel Simons to his son Benjamin, and by Benjamin to Benjamin Marion prior to 1775. (Confused yet?)

This first Peter Simons was the eldest son of Benjamin and Mary Esther DuPré Simons and was known in the records as Capt. Peter Simons. He was the militia captain for St. Thomas and St. Denis Parish. He served in the Royal Assembly from 1721-1725 and was a vestryman of the St. Thomas and St. Denis Church. Because of his early death, Simons died intestate. Historical evidence indicates that he made the portion of his lands that became Northampton his residence, that included the 500-acres given him by his father, descended to his son, Peter Simons II. Peter Simons II died in 1747, had no wife nor child, so his lands devolved to his sister, Esther Simons Bonneau and her husband Peter Bonneau. At his death a few months later, Peter Bonneau devised to his eldest son Peter Simons Bonneau his interest in “the plantation of my late brother-in-law Peter Simons II.”

In 1752, Esther Simons Bonneau married Benjamin Marion, brother to Francis, Job, Gabriel, and Isaac. Esther convinced her husband to purchase her son’s interest in her deceased brother’s lands, which he did in June of 1758. On the 500-acre tract that became part of Northampton, the Marions made their home, where they had more than likely lived, even prior to their purchase.

The Marions made their principal settlement just southwest of modern-day Northampton Road on the high ground overlooking the creek. A 1770 map of the area shows the Marion settlement located along the public road just beyond where it crosses the creek. Modern day USFS Road 170-C corresponds and the house site most likely sits just north of the intersection of USFS Road 170 and 170-C.

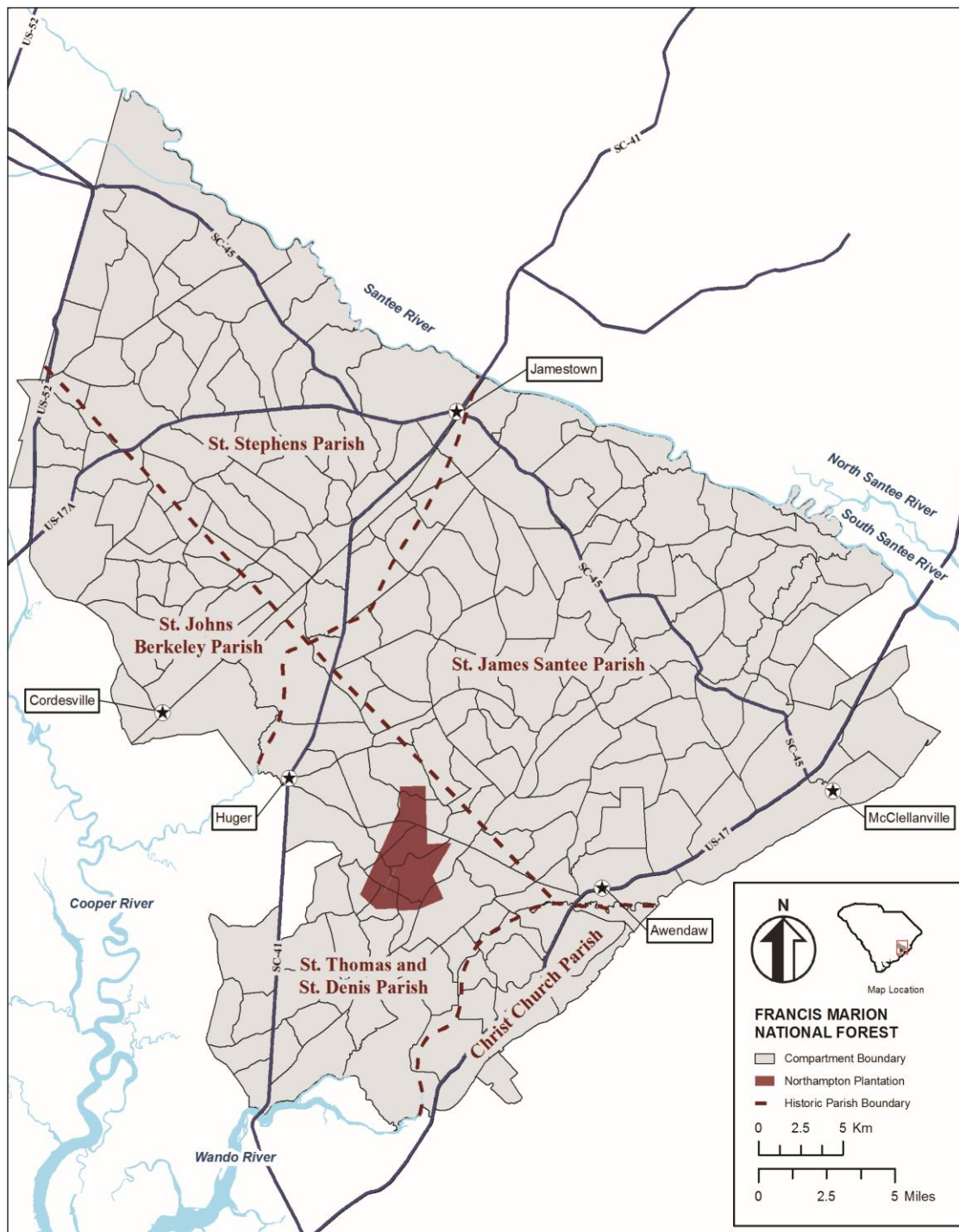
By 1776, Charles Town had become the wealthiest ‘per white citizen’ city in British North America, with rice exports alone totaling nearly £2.5 million sterling. The city was exporting more goods than New York, which had twice as many inhabitants.

This agricultural property required an army of laborers, and Carolinians utilized enslaved Africans for the task. From the 1670s until the US government outlawed importing slaves in 1808, slave traders seized hundreds of thousands of Africans from their homelands and shipped them across the Atlantic via the Middle Passage to the slave markets of Carolina.

As stated above, the owner of this section was Benjamin Marion, son of Gabriel and Esther Cordes Marion. He was a staunch supporter of the American cause in the Revolution and loaned the Revolutionary Government of South Carolina more than £23,000. His younger brother, Francis Marion, much later, was dubbed “Swamp Fox.” Benjamin served in the Revolutionary General Assembly from 1776-1778 and filled the office of tax collector for Charleston District. The Marions made their home where the Simons family once lived and expanded their rice planting efforts in Northampton Creek. Benjamin Marion (my 4th Great-Grandfather) served the Revolutionary cause as an officer in the South Carolina Militia until his death 20 September 1778. He was survived by his four daughters.

Benjamin’s four daughters agreed to sell portions of their father’s rice plantation in 1786, and conveyed 1,500 acres, including the residence, to Hopson Pinckney. Pinckney owned the adjoining Cypress Pond plantation to the northwest. (This Pinckney was not a member of the celebrated SC family of the same name, but was the son of Roger Pinckney of Peterborough, England.) Pinckney died in February 1794, and his daughter, Anna Maria, inherited the land called “Marion’s Old Field” at her marriage. Unfortunately, prior to Pinckney’s death, he had defaulted on his loan to the Commission, and Edward Thomas purchased the 500-acre Peter Simons portion of Pinckney’s land. This tract included the Simons and Marion homeplace.

To be continued . . .



Location of Northampton Plantation inside St. Thomas and St. Denis Parish
 Many thanks to USFS and *Brockington and Associates* for their research and use of this map.