

Short History of Beaufort County/Pinckney Island

A.K.A Mackey's Island or Lookout Island

Before Columbus Prior to the arrival of Europeans native peoples inhabited the Beaufort area from about 11,000-12,000 years ago. The earliest evidence of Native Americans is found inland from the coast. At that time South Carolina was cooler and wetter with an abundance of herding animals, many of which are now extinct. These peoples were highly mobile.

Evidence of Native Americans on the barrier and sea islands is relatively easy to find. Shell middens are located on most islands and pottery shards are found on beaches and on eroded cliffs. While most pottery on the islands dates to the Mississippian Period or Colonial Time, some remains are much older. The shell ring in Sea Pines Planation on Hilton Head has been given a date of 4,000 years. The Green Shell Enclosure, which lies just across Skull Creek from Pinckney NWR was dated at 700 years before the present. *“The wildlife refuge, (speaking about Pinckney) unlike other federally preserved parcels of land, actually has a rich history of being a human habitat, and at least 115 prehistoric and historic sites have been identified within the island. Detailed research into the prehistoric sites indicate a long human occupation of Pinckney Island, dating all the way back to the Archaic Period, (8000-1000 BC), and suggesting heavy use during the Mississippian Period, (1000-1500 AD), when the region was solely inhabited by local Native Americans.”* (quoting from an on line article listed below)

Early Post Columbus . Other indications of Colonial Native American presence are a large Yemassee village site from the 18th century is found on Old Bailey Road in Okatie. And its seems Pinckney Island itself was once an Indian stronghold, since and early 18th century map marked, “ruins of a fort.”

The first Europeans to see our area were the Spanish (Captain Pedro de Salaza) who sailed into Port Royal Sound, just to the north of Pinckney Island, in the 1520's. They did not stay. Next came the French with Captain Jean Ribaut arriving in 1562. He named the sound Port Royal and started a settlement, Charlesfort, near the site of the present day Town of Port Royal. This settlement did not work out since Ribaut sailed back to France for supplies and the soldiers who were left behind revolted. They built the first American made ship to cross the Atlantic. They too sailed back to France.

The Spanish returned and in 1566 looking for northern outpost to protect “La Florida Province”. Santa Elena, the first capital was erected at Fort San Felipe, but came under attack from Native Americans. This settlement was abandoned (1576); the next year Fort San Felipe was rebuilt only to be abandoned ten years later with the arrival of Sir Francis Drake. The Spanish retreated to St. Augustine. The remains of Santa Elena have been found on a golf course on

Parris Island, right across Port Royal Sound. On Pinckney Island historic artifacts indicate that small-scale, impermanent settlements were made by French and Spanish groups in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Hilton Head is named for an English sea captain who was exploring the area in 1663 at the bequest of Caribbean planters. He named the island for himself. The “Head” refers to headlands that could be seen from the ocean. The first permanent European settlement of South Carolina was on the Ashley River in 1670.

The earliest history of purchase of Pinckney Island seems to be around 1708 to an Indian fur trader Alexander Mackay, who received a land grant for 200 acres. Seven years later the rest of the island and the surrounding smaller islands were added. He made his home here for a number of years. His widow remarried and the property was sold to Charles Pinckney in 1726.

Pinckney Era Charles Pinckney, a prominent lawyer and planter, used the land to grow cotton and indigo. Pinckney travel extensively and was often away from home. Running of the family estates was left to his wife Eliza Lucas Pinckney; she is renowned as America’s first important agriculturist. Eliza Pinckney (1739) began experimenting and improving strains of indigo, a plant she was familiar with from her childhood in Antigua. She spread indigo seeds to neighbors and between the years 1745-1746 the export of indigo from South Carolina rose from 5,000lbs to 130,000lbs. It was second only to rice as a cash crop. (I read nowhere that the Charles Pinckney’s ever lived on Pinckney Island.) On the death of her husband Charles (1758) the island passed to their son Charles Coatsworth Pinckney. Read more about Eliza Lucas Pinckney at <http://cwh.ucsc.edu/SocialBiog.Martin.pdf> and <http://www.encyclopedia.com/people/history/historians-miscellaneous-biographies/eliza-lucas-pinckney>

Charles Coatsworth Pinckney was a man of accomplishment; he was

- an aide to camp General George Washington
- a delegate to the U.S. Constitutional Convention
- a signer of the U.S. Constitution
- a minister to France
- the first South Carolina born lawyer

As a Federalist candidate the twice ran unsuccessfully for President of United States, once in 1804 and again in 1808. Charles Coatsworth Pinckney brought 200 slaves with to begin converting the island to a plantation. Charles Coatsworth Pinckney had a home at White Point on the north end of the island. They lived there (some sources say occasionally) and cultivated extensive ornamental gardens which were destroyed in the hurricane of 1824.

Read more about Charles Coatsworth Pinckney at

<http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/biographies/charles-cotesworth-pinckney/>

Post Charles Coatsworth Pinckney and Civil War Era The Island was inherited with three plantations houses and 349 slaves by daughter Harriott in 1825. She managed the property until 1861 when it was seized and occupied by Union Forces. Small skirmishes took place on the island. The most significant incident occurred on August 21, 1862, when the Confederate Beaufort Light Artillery/11th Infantry attacked the camp of Company H, third Regiment, New Hampshire Volunteers, killing four Union Soldiers and wounding ten men (eight Confederate and two Union.) Five U.S. Colored infantry headstones are located on the northwest side of the island, indicating that they were possibly slaves who were recruited by the Union Army. The Union forces later ransacked the island and after the war it was confiscated for \$310 in back taxes, but the heirs regained it 1866. The Pinckney family held on to the island after the war, but with their labor force freed, plantation style farming was no longer feasible. Some of the former slaves remained as tenant farmers.

Read more about the history at

<https://www.heritagelib.org/articles/pinckney-s-island>

<https://rootsrated.com/stories/a-brief-history-of-south-carolinas-pinckney-island>

<http://ourwarmikepride.blogspot.com/2013/05/blame-dead-guy.html>

<http://www.hiltonhead-sc.com/pinckney-island.html>

After the Pinckneys In 1937 Pinckney Island was sold to the Bruces, a wealthy couple from New York. The property was managed as a hunting reserve and much was done to enhance the land for wildlife, including the addition of ponds and planting of hardwoods. According to Alice Boyd, who grew up on the island during the time of the Barker/Starr's, the tenant farmers were encouraged to leave. In 1954 the land was sold to Edward Starr and James Madison Barker. The use of the land as a hunting retreat continued and at the death of Edward Starr his portion of the land was given to the Natural Land Trust (Island Packet,1973) At the death of James M. Barker the land was donated in its entirety to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a nature and forest preserve for aesthetic and conservation purposes.