

Indians, Tories, Patriots all part of rich Plantation lore

By Jim Littlejohn
Features Editor

"Back in those days, there were Indians" My grandfather never had a story published, but he knew instinctively how to grab an audience in the first few words — especially if that audience happened to be a 10-year-old boy.

Of course, he wasn't telling stories about Hilton Head Island, or its northeastern corner that today goes by the name of Hilton Head Plantation — but he might as well have been.

There is no doubt that the high, "bluffy" area overlooking Port Royal Sound and the broad reaches of Skull Creek contained its share of Indian encampments, although it really isn't known if many tribes made it more than a seasonal home.

About half way between the Old Fort Pub and Talbird Cemetery was a flowing spring that must have been patronized by various Indian tribes from time to time, because early settlers named it Indian Springs. It was the site of Indian encampments and villages for almost 4,000 years according to Mike Taylor, director of the Museum of Hilton Head.

Taylor recalls that during the early development of Hilton Head Plantation, The Sea Pines Company brought in Stanley South of the Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology in Columbia to do some investigative digging.

"Among their findings was evidence of a small palisade, which would definitely indicate someone using the area with defensive purpose in mind." Taylor says the group also found a wealth of European artifacts, some of the earliest to be found anywhere in the country.

It was in the plans of Sea Pines management to bring South back to complete his preliminary digs, but in all of the changes of the middle '70s, it never came to pass.

The spring itself is still flowing and lies between the present-day villa complexes of Indian Springs and Mariners Point, but the surrounding sites have now been lost to modern residential development.

Hilton Head and Skull Creek were well-known haunts of the raiding Yemassee long after the uprising of 1815 was supposedly laid to rest. In fact, one local historian would have it that Skull Creek was actually "Skulk Creek" and was so named because the savages "skulked" up and down its reaches, looking for white settlers to attack.

There are others, however, who tend toward the legend that pirates used these waters to careen their ships and perhaps hide their ill-gotten gains back up on the shore. The palisade remains discovered by South may well have been defenses for a wooden blockhouse similar to the one in Robert Louis Stevenson's "Treasure Island."

Certainly Indian attacks were common enough during the days between the area's first settlements in the early 1700s. The friendly Cusabos usually allied themselves with the settlers, but roving tribes of Ogeechees, Yemassee and Creeks, all subtribes of the Cherokees, were warlike and quick to take offense when they felt cheated by the so-called "Indian Traders."

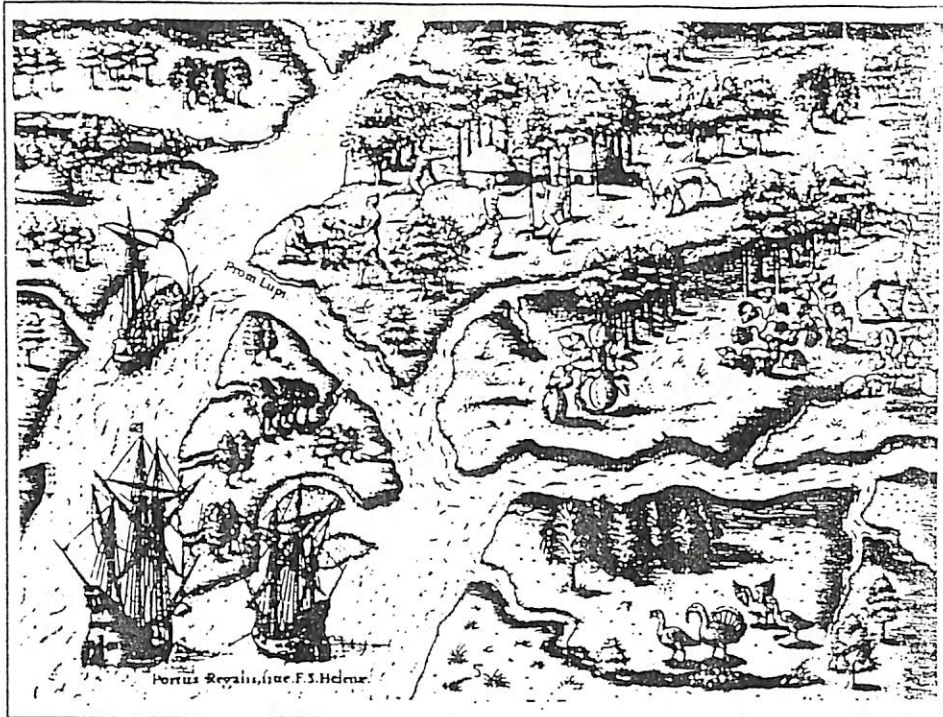
The Cusabos were already near extinction, due to numerous attacks by the Westoes, a reputedly cannibalistic tribe from the inland, and even though they were given land and food, the tribe had virtually disappeared by 1740.

The Yemassee Wars

The Yemassee were friendly enough most of the time and, indeed, had allied themselves with the English colonists in wars against the Spanish and against the raiding Tuscaroras of North Carolina. Col. John Barnwell got his nickname of "Tuscarora Jack" from a series of campaigns he led in aid of the besieged North Carolinians in 1711 and 1712.

It was for this and later similar acts of deriding-do that Barnwell was granted three 500-acre plantations on Hilton Head by the Lords Proprietors in 1717.

Before that, however, came the Yemassee War of 1715.



Indians fascinated early explorers of the South Carolina seacoast. In this engraving of Port Royal Sound by Theodore DeBry of one of the earliest maps by cartographer Jacques Le-Moyne, they are depicted hunting and cooking amidst a Garden of Eden-like bounty.

Having heard of unrest among the Yemassee and rumors of an uprising, South Carolina Governor Charles Craven sent a deputation of men familiar with the Indians to Pocatigo, the site of the Yemassee nation, to discuss problems.

The men were received well enough and were invited to a special feast in the evening, but early the next morning (Easter Sunday, as it happened,) the Yemassee fell on the sleeping men and massacred all but two.

The two men ran, splitting up when they came to a path offering two directions of escape. Seaman Burroughs, continued on toward the river and possible return to Port

Royal Island, but his companion, John Wright, hid in the bushes and had to undergo the mental torture of watching the destruction of his friends. Burroughs, despite an arrow through his neck and cheek, managed to reach Whale Branch, a tidal inlet, a few steps ahead of his pursuers. He ran into the water, made a surface dive and swam the stream, eluding his attackers.

As luck would have it, the first inhabited area he reached was the farm community of Tuscarora Jack Barnwell, who attended Burroughs' wounds as best he could and then sent his household and servants in all directions to warn the area that the Indians had arisen.

Burroughs' Heroism

The settlers came in from all over to the tiny community that had begun to form along the banks of the Beaufort River. A ship was in the middle of paying a trading call on Beaufort, and as a result of its presence and some other craft in the harbor, the assembled planters and their families were able to board and get clear of the land, just minutes ahead of the arrival of the Yemassee.

Despite Burroughs heroism and the swift action taken by Barnwell, over 100 settlers lost their lives during the next few days.

One of those who was to lose both his hair and his life was Christopher Dawson, who must have been the first European to live and work on Hilton Head. According to historical accounts, Dawson had a 200-acre plantation on Skull Creek and was later found there, mutilated by the aroused Yemassee.

With the help of Barnwell and Lt. Col. Alexander Mackey, the Granville County Militia defeated the Yemassee decisively at Pocatigo, but the fighting continued openly for more than a year before a treaty was signed.