

DO YOU KNOW?

History of Seabrook Island

Seabrook Island was inhabited by coastal Indians - the Kiawah, Stono, and Bohicket tribes - as early as 1,400 BC. Lt. Col. Robert Sanford arrived on Seabrook Island in 1666 as an explorer working on behalf of Britain's King Charles II. By 1684, the local Stono Indians were persuaded to cede their lands to the Lord's Proprietors, who eventually sold the property to English settlers. The island's first owner, Thomas Jones, named the island for himself and was responsible for keeping Haulover Creek navigable so that goods could be transported between the Kiawah and Bohicket Rivers. As Johns Island's creeks, rivers, and marshes were good places for ships to hide, Privateer Creek on Seabrook was a favorite place for boats to hide while waiting for unsuspecting ships to pass by. Ebenezer Simmons purchased the island around 1753 and, again, named it for himself. Both the Jones and Simmons families used the property to grow indigo, rice, and cotton.

During the Revolutionary War, in 1779, British and Hessian soldiers landed on the beach to build flat-bottomed boats for use in transporting goods up the Bohicket River. When Charleston was liberated in 1782, the British left the island and attention returned to growing cotton.

William Seabrook, a Sea Island cotton planter, purchased Simmons Island in 1816 and, following tradition of the other owners, gave it his Seabrook family name. Mr. Seabrook pioneered the use of salt marsh mud as fertilizer and was one of the first to successfully cultivate Sea Island cotton, which replaced rice and indigo as Johns Island's main cash crop. Since length of Sea Island cotton is 2" greater than mainland cotton, it could be woven into very fine cloth and yielded a higher price. Although Seabrook Island was part of Mr. Seabrook's extensive cotton plantation that extended for thousands of acres along the coast, a large part of the island was never put under cultivation. It remained wooded for use as a source of timber and live trees for landscaping, and as a home for free-roaming hogs, cattle, and horses.



Upon Mr. Seabrook's death in 1836, island ownership was divided between his two sons. The island saw some occupation and fighting by Union and Confederate forces during the Civil War and was abandoned, along with the other Sea Islands, by order of the Confederate Army in 1861. In 1863, Seabrook's children sold the island to the family of William Gregg, a textile magnate who became active in promoting the industrialization of the South.

During the Civil War, the island became a staging area for Union troops. They came into port at Privateer Creek and occupied the island. The 3-day long "Battle of Haulover Cut" costing 34 lives, was fought on the Johns Island shore of the Haulover Cut. In 1881, the Greggs sold the island to William Andell. The Andells loved the trees and would not allow the land to be logged, accounting for some of the very large and significant trees that are still visible on the island.

In 1938, the Andells sold a large portion of Seabrook Island to Victor Morawetz of New York City. Morawetz allowed part of the property to be used for the Episcopal Church's Camp St. Christopher, and then in 1951 deeded the property at no cost to the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina. When the church learned they would not be allowed to use their tax-exempt status for all of the property, it sold all but 230 acres (the current Camp St. Christopher) in 1970 to the Seabrook Island Development Corporation.