

Okatie, a fairly insignificant corner of Beaufort County

CLOSE CALL

Cherry Point Ltd. Partnership bought the 927-acre Indigo Plantation¹ in 1989 after 2 years of negotiations and delays following former Hilton Head Island developer Bobby Ginn's personal bankruptcy. An April 1996 *Beaufort Gazette* article reported that Cherry Point partner Herb King "envisioned an agreement with Beaufort County that would allow 4000 houses and apartments, a substantial commercial development and two golf courses on the largely underdeveloped Indigo Plantation." Can you imagine?

It seems incomprehensible to us at Oldfield today to think about that kind of density was even considered but the Cherry Point plan was only one in a series of land development schemes concocted for Okatie between 1982 (the end of the Carrier years) and 1998 (the year Indigo Plantation was placed under contract by Crescent Resources). Also predicted and published in 1996 were growth projections for Okatie. "In addition to Sun City, development in and around Pinckney Colony, Chechessee, Camp St. Mary, Indigo Plantation and Callawassie and Spring Islands are expected to raise Okatie's population from about 1,000 to 30,000 in 2010 with 500 acres of commercial development expected." That projection, thankfully was overly ambitious as the 2010 census has Okatie at 12,510. I'd have to say we dodged a bullet!

Nevertheless, Beaufort County's history of politics, land ownership, boundaries and even name for Beaufort County has always been changeable and a bit confusing.

COLONIAL YEARS and the THE WAR OF NORTHERN AGGRESSION

The proprietary government of Carolina was laid out in the late 17th century. Charleston was the political center. By 1707 the region between the Combahee and Savannah Rivers was referred to as Granville County.²

The economy of Granville County/Beaufort District during this period grew apace with the district's demographic development. It evolved from the early days of trading with the Yamassee and other native tribes into a diversified plantation economy by the mid-eighteenth century. Indigo was cultivated on the Sea Islands, while rice flourished in the fresh water tidal marshes of the mainland. Livestock and provision farming were prevalent and the region's live oak and long leaf pine forests provided shipbuilding materials and naval stores. The deep waters of the sounds surrounding the Sea Islands fostered a small, shipbuilding industry.

During the Civil War, the land between Hilton Head Island and Port Royal Island was an ill-defined no-man's land; part of the Southern Confederacy but tucked between two union strongholds, Hilton Head Island and the town of Beaufort. Throughout the war nonetheless, the area was continually menaced by military raids and attacks by northern gunboats. So, while surviving the war relatively intact, Beaufort County was shaken socially, economically and emotionally. The fighting ended on April 9, 1865 when General Robert E. Lee surrendered his Confederate Army to General Ulysses S. Grant at the village of Appomattox Court House in Virginia.³

ADDITIONALLY



¹ When sold by Robin Carrier to Bobby Ginn in 1982, the 550 acre Indigo Plantation was a sportmen's paradise with the river for boating and fishing, 450 acres of timber creating wildlife habitat for deer and quail hunting, plus about 70 acres in soybean fields, meadows and pastures. Ginn was already fighting lawsuits and at the brink of personal bankruptcy but indulged his love of Indigo Plantation. He added an additional 337 acres, built more than 6 miles of white fences to surround pastures for up to 100 quarter horses and reoriented the property's entrance to Highway 170. For 5 years, Indigo Plantation was the Ginn family's weekend and summer retreat.

² With the formation of circuit court districts in 1769, Granville County became Beaufort District (later Beaufort County) and encompassed the previously establish parishes of St. Helena, Prince William, St. Peters and St. Luke's. The Oldfield is located in what was historically St. Luke's Parish.



³ The 1860 census records that the population in Beaufort County (which included Jasper County at that time) was 40,053 people, 16.7% white, 2% free black and 83.1% slave. By 1880 the 30,176 people were divided as: 8% or 2442 white, 91.9% or 27,732 black. Those numbers did not change much into the early decades of the 20th century.

20TH CENTURY CHANGES

Beaufort County was large and influential. By act of the South Carolina General Assembly on February 18, 1878, the northern portion of Beaufort County was cut away to form Hampton County ... and by 1912 Jasper County was formed from portions of Hampton County and Beaufort County.

Bridges⁴ and better roads for trains and eventually automobiles had a huge impact on the county's economy, use of land and development of tourism. The biggest economic boom in northern Beaufort County during the early 20th century was the expansion by the U. S. Department of Defense - Parris Island Marine Corps Base and the Marine Corps Air Station - making the U. S. Marine Corps the county's largest employer. By the mid-20th century, southern Beaufort County was poised to undergo an economic boom too, its in real estate and resort development.

DEFINING OUR MISUNDERSTOOD CORNER IS NOT EASY

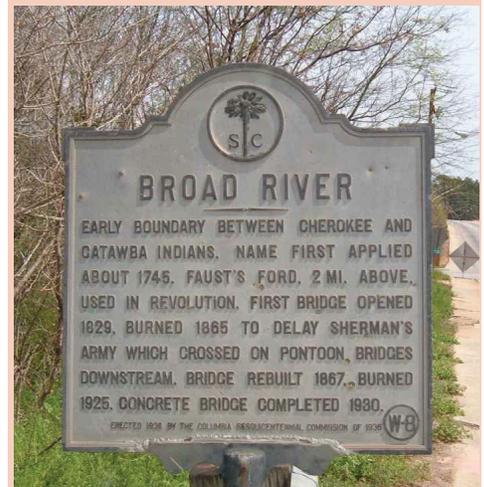
For centuries people, old land maps and official documents have referred to our unincorporated corner of Beaufort County by a variety of descriptive names including Pierpont or Pearpoint, Wigg's Bluff, Altamaha, Cherry Point, Sandy Hill, Low Bottom and Okatie. The debate about what to call ourselves played out in passionate newspaper commentaries. For instance this December 1995 entreaty written by Dot Gnann: "The name Okatie reaches to the very roots of our county. As the oldest identifiable name in Beaufort and Jasper counties, it should be preserved if for no other reason than to protect our joint Indian heritage. The names of rivers, mountains, Indian lands and tribes are the only historic treasures that have been able to withstand the shock of time. I hope citizens, developers and public officials of Beaufort and Jasper Counties will unite in embracing the beautiful, historic name, Okatie, rather than allow it to skip away without as much as a whimper."⁵

Soon thereafter, the Beaufort County Council passed a resolution establishing the name Okatie for the unincorporated area bordering Highway 170 from the Broad River bridge to Pritchardville. The road was also renamed Okatie Highway along that stretch.

So I guess we live at Oldfield (formerly Indigo Plantation) in Okatie (formerly used in reference to a Yemassee Indian village), in the county of Beaufort (formerly Granville) County in the state of South Carolina (formerly the Royal Colony of Carolina). And, not to be forgotten, Oldfield lands were formally part of the fertile coastal plain that supported native Americans from as early as 10,000 BC. Oldfield welcomes you home.

ADDITIONALLY

⁴ Bridging the Broad River: First bridge opened 1829, then burned in 1865 to delay Sherman's army which crossed on pontoon bridges downstream anyway. Bridge was rebuilt in 1867. Burned 1925. A concrete bridge was completed in 1930. The pictured plaque was erected by the Columbia Sesquicentennial Commission of 1936. Next try was a two-lane drawbridge over the Broad River in 1958 which was improved with a larger and taller fixed-span bridge. The current four-lane wide structure was completed in 2004 and carries South Carolina Highway 170 as it reconnects the northern and southern sections of Beaufort County.



⁵ Okeetee, Okety, Okatie and Okatee; an Indian name that was spelled phonetically, therefore differently by many colonists from Spain, France and England. By the turn of the 20th century "Okatie" was accepted as the spelling.