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SOMERSET PLANTATION IS ONE OF THE HISTORIC PLACES DOOMED BY  
~~SANTEE-COOPER PROJECT~~

Property Dates to 1696 - Now Owned by Cain Family  
By. F. M. Kirk

Pinopolis. Aug. 17. - Special. Some two miles from Pinopolis lies Somerset Plantation, on which is located one of the finest plantation homes in Middle St. John's. Towering above the centuries-old liveoaks around it, it stands proud of the history of its past, quietly awaiting the doom threatened it by the waters of the projected Santee-Cooper dam development.

One of the few plantation homes in this community still inhabited by the families of ante-bellum owners it remains in good repair, and is still the seat of that hospitality which made the South famous in a happier day. Built on the conventional style of Colonial homes. It is distinguished from neighboring houses by a slate roof. It is now owned by the heirs of the late Dr. Joseph P. Cain.

Somerset, like most of the adjoining tracts, traces its history back to that period of Huguenot emigration shortly after the founding of Charleston. Unlike most of the neighboring plantations however, it was not originally owned by a Huguenot. Somerset is closely linked in tradition and history with its sister plantation Samerton.

GRANTS MADE IN 1696

The two places had their nucleus in a grant of 804 acres made to John Stewart in 1696. Some accounts place this date at an even earlier period. During a period of Huguenot settlement, French emigrants soon had a newcomer of a different faith in their midst: for two years after receiving his grant, Stewart conveyed it to the Rev. William Screven, considered by some to have been the first Baptist minister to come to South Carolina. According to tradition, not backed up by available historical facts, the Rev. Mr. Screven desired the tract for the purpose of founding a town, at what later became Somerton Plantation, as a haven for Baptists.

Apparently Mr. Screven abandoned his plans, for in 1704 he sold his 804 acres together with an additional 300 acres he had secured probably by grant, to Rene Ravanel, the Huguenot emigrant.

It was not until 1736 that a definite distinction was made between the two places. In that year Paul Ravenel, son of emigrant Rene Ravenel conveyed 735 acres of land called "Somerset" to his brother Daniel Ravenel.

For many years the tract of land witnessed a series of divisions and additions and changing of hands, gradually, however, building up into a larger and larger plantation.

Through marriage, the place passed into the hands of the Mazyck family. The tract was purchased jointly by Isaac M. Porcher and William Cain in 1827, the latter securing the house site. Since that date Somerset has remained in the hands of the Cain family.

#### REMODELED IN 1854

No records are extant as to the date of the building of the building of Somerset house. It is only known that it was remodeled by William Cain in 1854.

William Cain was undoubtedly one of the most outstanding men of his day in St. John's and was well known to the entire state. For many years he was a member of the state legislature, having served in both houses. He was a member of the electoral college which elected Polk as president of the United States. He also served as lieutenant governor of South Carolina. He was captain of "minutemen" during the Nullification period, and was a signer of the ordinance of secession.

The fertile lands of Somerset yielded rich harvests of cotton, which was shipped far and wide.

In an address before the St. John's hunting club at Indianfield plantation in 1907, the late Rev. Dr. Robert Wilson paid the following tribute to William Cain:

"The last of these commanding figures that gave dignity and conserving tone to the St. John's hunting club of a half century ago, and which loom on the horizon of memory into a magnitude which is perhaps nearer their true proportions than that which appealed with the diminishing effect of familiarity to the contemporary eye, is that of Mr. William Cain of Somerset. Tall of stature, dignified in presence and deliberate in all his movements, Mr. Cain exhibited to all a gentle courtesy and polished address which testified conclusively that these traits were not the exclusive heritage of pure Huguenot descent..... Like the others, Mr. Cain was a successful planter of long cotton and his crops usually brought the top of the market. I do not know any better illustration of his courteous good humor than the pleasant and unprotesting smile with which he accepted the statement of a gentleman who was credited with seeing many things and telling more, that walking through the streets of Paris he had been surprised and gratified at seeing a number of familiar round bales of St. John's Berkeley, all marked W.C."

#### HOUSE DESCRIBED

Situated in the midst of a yard of many acres, covered with magnificent specimens of live oak, the house presents a striking appearance at any angle. It is high above the ground, and consists of two full stories and an attic. The interior is simply but beautifully decorated with hand carving. A beautiful feature of the living room is the black marble mantelpiece.

Many a family in lower South Carolina is connected by blood and by tradition to Somerset, and many a family sadly awaits the day that a historic landmark and family shrine is obliterated by muddy Santee.