

CONFEDERATES AND REFUGEES SHELTERED AT WALNUT GROVE

Federals Stripped Shutters and Doors From Plantation House
In Santee Basin and Threw Out Furniture and Valuables

By F. M. Kirk

Eutawville, Oct. 19. - Special: Walnut Grove, now the home of Fred Conner, is one of the historic plantations in upper St. John's Parish whose destiny depends upon plans of the Santee Cooper Project. It lies in that area along Highway 45, dotted with ante-bellum plantations, which will be covered by Santee River waters if the dam project materializes.

The house, built in 1818, stands on land slightly higher than the surrounding country and may possibly escape the rush of Santee to the sea by way of Cooper River. Most of the planting lands, however, on which the plantation's existence depends, will be submerged.

The settlement of St. John's Parish seems first to have centered around the Black Oak section, where French Huguenots secured grants in the seventeenth century following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. As more emigrants arrived, the community spread upwards towards Eutaw Springs, which became known as Upper St. John's.

Walnut Grove appears to have been one of the early grants in the upper part of the parish. The rich lands along the river made it one of the most prosperous sections in the state, and soon St. Stephen's planters were forsaking their plantations to settle in St. John's.

Grants Date To 1757

The nucleus of the plantation now known as Walnut Grove was granted to James Roberts in 1757. It then contained five hundred and ninety acres. Constant additions greatly increased the size of the tract.

North of Walnut Grove, separated only by Highway 45, for generations known as the River Road, lies Pond Bluff, granted to James Fludd in 1758. General Francis Marion bought Pond Bluff in 1773 and made his home there. About the same time the general's nephew Robert Marion, secured Walnut Grove. Apparently, Robert Marion never lived there, but remained at his father's plantation. Belle Isle in Berkeley, where General Marion is buried.

In his "Upper Beat of St. John's," Professor Frederick Porcher says Walnut Grove was the homestead of Gabriel Gignilliat. Gignilliat, who was Robert Marion's brother-in-law, died in 1803. With his death, the Gignilliat name, once so numerous in Berkeley County, ended in this section.

The plantation was bought the following year (1804) by Captain John Palmer, of St. Stephen Parish. Captain Palmer, son of "Turpentine John", had bought Springfield, a nearby plantation, some years before. He continued to live, however, in Pineville, of which he was considered the patriarch.

\$9,000 Paid For Place

By 1808, Captain Peter Gaillard, of the Rocks, had made several fortunes in cotton culture. He already owned several plantations in St. Stephen's and St. John's Parishes, but he gave his friend, Captain Palmer, \$9,000 for Walnut Grove and deeded it over to his son, Thomas.

Thomas Gaillard was more a litterateur than a planter. In 1812, he exchanged Walnut Grove with his brother, James, and went to live at Dawshee, another of his father's St. John's plantations. Later he moved to Laurel Hill, still another of Captain Gaillard's plantations in St. Stephen's Parish.

In 1832, Thomas Gaillard moved to Alabama, where he devoted himself to writing. He is the author of a "History of the Christian Church", a "History of the Presbyterian Church," and numerous papers, most of them devoted to defending the principles of the Union Party, of which Richard Yeadon, former editor of the Charleston Courier, was secretary.

Nothing is known of the house formerly standing at Walnut Grove in which Gabriel Gignilliat lived. The present house was built in 1818 by James Gaillard. In general architecture, it closely resembles the Rocks, where the builders father lived. The same type of hand carving, for which the section is famous, adorns the mantels and panels of the interior.

Cultivation Intensive Yet

In 1881, the place was sold by the heirs of James Gaillard to Frederick Conner, whose grandson now lives there.

Walnut Grove is typical of many plantations in Upper St. John's. The fertile fields, which have been cultivated continuously for more than a century, are still intensively planted.

James Gaillard was too far advanced in years to enter active service during the War Between the States. He did his part by making his home a place of refuge for defenseless women, and Confederate scouts. It is said that his house was always filled with women whose fathers and husbands were with the armies. Confederate scouts were always welcomed to meals.

As Walnut Grove lies between the Nelson's Ferry Road to the south, and the River Road to the north, it was easy access to troops on their way to the front, and to Yankee raiders when they visited the section.

Because of his activities, James Gaillard was a marked man for Yankee raiders, and few plantations suffered the ruthless destruction of property as did Walnut Grove.

Wrecked by Federals

"Mr. Gaillard is at this time the oldest and most respected inhabitant of this country," wrote Professor Frederick A. Parcher in 1868. "Venerated not more for his four score years than for his estimable character. But neither his character nor his age could save him from the brutality of General A. S. Hartwell, who, never having distinguished himself in the presence of an armed enemy gave ample proof of his prowess by the ferocity with which he chastised the defenseless and unarmed men, women, and children of this parish, after the Confederate troops had abandoned it.

When General Hartwell's troops arrived at Walnut Grove they found two Confederate scouts riding away from the house, where they had been given breakfast.

Adjutant General Torrey, aide to General Hartwell, was enraged to discover that the master of the house had been sheltering "bushwackers" as he called them. He proposed to burn the house, and immediately ordered every one out.

The courageous women inside came out on the piazza, but refused to come further, realizing that the minute they descended the steps, the house would be set on fire. Their bravery saved the house.

They stood on the piazza while soldiers ripped off all shutters and doors and threw out all furniture and valuables. A few valuables were saved. Several slaves gathered what they could and hid them until the raiders had left.