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## ON THE BUILDING OF FORT JOHNSON

HARRY S. MUSTARD\*

Fort Johnson, which stood on Windmill Point, James Island, exists now only as a memory, but because of its historic past there have been many references to its role in the defense of Charleston harbor and to the year in which the fort was built. This is as it should be, and it seems likely that similar references will be made in the future. Many of the often quoted texts of South Carolina history, however, give the year 1706 or earlier as the date at which the fort was built, while other histories, and documents of the early 1700's indicate that it was somewhat later. In the circumstances, and in the interest of the record, it seems worthwhile to explore these conflicting statements.

Most of the references to the building of Fort Johnson, as presented in histories of South Carolina, are found in descriptions of preparations for defense of Charles Town against an expected attack by the French and Spaniards. This attack came in the late summer of 1706. So far as can be determined, the Reverend Alexander Hewat was the first of South Carolina's historians to associate the building of Fort Johnson with preparations to meet this particular threat. In this connection, he says, "A small fort called Fort Johnson, was erected on James' Island, and several great guns mounted on it."<sup>1</sup>

Among others, Ramsay, Simms, Snowden, and Oliphant follow Hewat with close or expanded paraphrasing. William A. Courtenay, who did much to make transcripts of early colonial documents available for study, gives the year 1704 as the date at which a fort was built on Windmill Point.<sup>2</sup>

\* Dr. Mustard, of Boykin, S. C., author of four books and a frequent contributor to medical journals, has long been a student of South Carolina history in the colonial period. His *Government in Public Health* (New York, 1945) brought to light the fact that the first provincial health officer in the colonies was a Carolinian.

<sup>1</sup> Alexander Hewat, *An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia* (London, 1779) as reproduced in B. R. Carroll, *Historical Collections of South Carolina* (New York, 1836), I, 158.

<sup>2</sup> David Ramsay, *The History of South Carolina . . .* (Charleston, 1809), I, 129; William Gilmore Simms, *The History of South Carolina*, rev. ed. (New York, 1860), 80; Yates Snowden, *History of South Carolina* (Chicago and New York, 1920), I, 144; Mary C. Simms Oliphant, *The History of South Carolina* (Forest, Ill., 1958), 76; W. A. Courtenay, "The Centennial of the Incorporation of the City of Charleston," *Charleston Year Book, 1883* (Charleston [1883]), 472.

From these writings has come a rather widespread acceptance of the year 1706 or earlier as the time at which Fort Johnson was built. Against acceptance of this date, however, there is a considerable body of evidence. Among historians, Rivers does not mention Fort Johnson as constituting part of the defenses of Charles Town in 1706. On the contrary, he quotes part of a letter from the Governor and Council to the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, dated September 17, 1708, reporting that ". . . at the entrance of the harbor, on a place called Windmill point, . . . is now building and almost finished, a Triangular Fort and platform. . . ." <sup>3</sup> McCrady in his discussion of preparations for the expected attack, follows Rivers in quoting the Council report of 1708.<sup>4</sup> Wallace makes a direct statement as to when the fort was built: "In 1708 at Windmill Point was built to guard the harbor entrance the work called as early as 1713 'Johnson's Fort'. . . ." <sup>5</sup>

Quite aside from these secondary texts, records contemporary with the building of a fort on Windmill Point are available. Thus the Act <sup>6</sup> authorizing the undertaking was ratified April 24, 1708, and various entries in the Journal of the Commons House of Assembly relate to subsequent actions in this connection, thus:

<sup>3</sup> William J. Rivers, *A Sketch of the History of South Carolina . . .* (Charleston, 1856), 207. He here provides a footnote: "Fort Johnson, 2 Stat., 333." This reference, however, is to the Act ordering that a guard be kept on the fort (see footnote 9) rather than to the Act directing that the fort be built. The report from which Rivers quotes is British Public Record Office document C. O. 5-1264, No. 80, ff. 152-157. It may be found in *Records in the British Public Record Office Relating to South Carolina, 1701-1710* (Columbia, 1947), V, 203-210.

<sup>4</sup> Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina* (New York, 1897), I, 395.

<sup>5</sup> David D. Wallace, *The History of South Carolina* (New York, 1934), I, 168. In substantiation of his statement Wallace gives as references the Council report of 1708, and *Statutes at Large*, II, 333, 613. The first of these statute references is the same as that given by Rivers (footnote 3 above); the second relates to an Act of 1713, also concerned with the guarding of Fort Johnson.

<sup>6</sup> An Act for the building a fortification on Windmill Point. . . . Thomas Cooper, ed., *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina* (Columbia, 1837), II, 328, No. 279. Cooper notes that the original Act is not to be found, that one section is preserved by Trott. Trott's section is, in effect, the title: "An Act for the building a fortification on Windmill Point, and to barr and lay Booms cross the Channel of Ashley River and to cast up Trenches along the White Point and other necessary Places, and, to Provide a Publick Store of Provisions, Ammunition and small Arms, and to draw Money out of the Publick Treasury to defray the Charges of the Same." Since Trott wrote in 1736, building the fort was then an accomplished fact, and he marked the Act "Obsolete." Nicholas Trott, *The Laws of the Province of South Carolina* (Charles Town, 1736), 153.

*December 10, 1708.* Ordered that the Public Receiver pay unto Mr. James Longbois, the sum of fifty pounds in part for his care and trouble at the fort on wind mill point, and that this order be sent to the Governor and Council for their concurrence.

*December 17, 1708.* The Committee to whom it was referred, what Guns and other Habiliments of warr are wanting towards the defence of this province; Report. For the New fort at the entrance of the Harbor on Mill point

16 Guns Cannon 42 lbs Shott

12 Demi Cannon 36 lbs Shott

6 Falkners Taper bore to scale the lines with partridge

100 Bbls Powder for the said Guns

500 Great Shott 42 lbs

360 Gun shott of 36 pnds & partridge for the Scalers

Brass Ladles and 500 [lbs?] match.

*February 10, 1709.* Capt Jonathan Drake Commissioner of the fortification on Wind Mill point appearing, and Mr. Speaker informed him the House expected an estimate to be laid before them of what orders he hath drawn on the Receiver, prayed leave till Monday to lay the same before the House.

*February 16, 1709.* That Capt Rich Peterson and Mr. David Durham wait on the Governor and Council and inform them that the House designs to go down to Wind Mill point in order to view the fortification.

*February 19, 1709.* Ordered that the Public Receiver do pay the several Charges that were expended in the House going to view the fortification on Wind Mill point; and that Mr. Speaker sign this order.

*April 27, 1709.* Capt. Jonathan Drake, according to order attended the House, and being asked by Mr. Speaker if he would accept of being Commander of the Fort on Wind Mill point, answered he would; and upon debating the same, Resolved That Capt Jonathan Drake be commander of the fort on Wind Mill point and that he be allowed seventy pounds per annum.

*April 29, 1709.* Ordered that a Committee be appointed to bring in a bill for settling a Guard on Wind Mill point.

*May 3, 1709.* Ordered: That Capt James Lamboy [Longbois] be paid out of the Publick Treasury, the sum of one hundred pounds for his constant attendance and laying out of the fortifications on

Wind Mill point; and that this order be sent to the Gov & Council for their concurrence.

Motion being made that John King be paid for his land taken up on Wind Mill point Ordered that he attend the House tomorrow morning.

*May 4, 1709.* John King according to order attended the House and being asked by Mr. Speaker what he demanded for his land on Wind Mill point; answered three hundred pounds, and then withdrew, and upon debating the same Ordered

That Mr. Jonathan Drake, Mr. James Whitter and Mr. William Wilkins do forth with repair to the plantation of John King on Wind Mill point, there to appraise and value the house and land thereunto belonging, consisting of 100 acres, or thereabouts, as also some damage done to the Crops of the said King by negroes employed by the publick the last Summer, and the same return upon oath to this House on friday morning next. [May 6].

*May 5, 1709.* [Considered] A bill for settling a guard on Johnstons Fort.<sup>7</sup>

*May 6, 1709.* Captain Jonathan Drake, Mr. James Whitter and Mr. Jno. Wilkins<sup>8</sup> according to order, brought in the appraisement of Jno Kings plantation and value the same at one hundred and forty pounds.

The Assembly was prorogued shortly after this but had time to ratify on May 7, 1709, an Act to Sette a Guard in Johnsons Fort on Windmill Point.<sup>9</sup> The preamble to this Act sets forth that "Whereas the Fort lately built upon Windmill Point cannot be of any use to the safety of this Province, without a sufficient guard is kept therein. . . ." There then follows the body of the Act. Section VI provides ". . . That the said fort on Windmill Point is hereby appointed to be the rendezvous of the company on James Island in case of an alarm. . . ." Section IX sets forth that ". . . for the better encouragement and adding to the yearly salary of the Captain of Johnson's Fort . . . [every vessel departing from

<sup>7</sup> Seemingly, this is the first recorded association of the Governor's name with the new fortification. The insertion of a "t" in his name was in keeping with the casualness with which surnames were then spelled. However, in an Act ratified two days later, his name is correctly spelled in the title.

<sup>8</sup> It was probably John Wilkins, rather than William Wilkins, as carried in entry of May 4.

<sup>9</sup> Cooper, Statutes, II, 333, No. 285.

Charles Town shall pay] . . . to the said commander, the sum of one shilling and three pence. . . .”

Only one reference to the fort is found in the Journal of the next session of the House. On October 29, 1709, there was “Read the Petition of John Simmons and Jn Vanderhorst praying to be considered for their work on Wind Mill point.” Mr. John Simmons was allowed seventeen pounds and Mr. John Vanderhorst fifteen pounds.

These records do not, of themselves, preclude the possibility that there was a fort on Windmill Point in 1704 or 1706, that it was abandoned, that John King had come into possession of the property between 1706 and 1708. The following record, however, throws light on the length of time John King owned Windmill Point before it was pre-empted for Fort Johnson in 1708:<sup>10</sup>

Know all men by these presents that I William Russell of this Province Cooper for divers good causes and considerations me hereunto moving have given and Granted and by these presents do freely Clearly and absolutely give and Grant unto John King of this province Cordwinder and his heirs for ever a plantation Containing one Hundred Acres of Land now in possession of the said John King known by the name of Mill Point being on James Island and butts and bounds as may appear by a platt annexed unto the Grant To Have and to Hold the s'd Hundred Acres of Land and all and Singular the houses, Edifices, wood under woods Timber and Timber trees wayes Easements, profitts and Commodities now Standing Growing and being on the Same unto the s'd John King and his heirs for ever, for his or their benefitt and use, In witness whereof I have hereunto sett my hand and seal this tenth day of January Anno Domini one thousand seven hundred and four.

Sealed and Delivered in the

the mark of  
p'sence of Elizabeth X Clemmens  
Sam'll Langley

The mark of  
WM X Russell <sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Records of the Secretary of the Province: Grants, Mortgages, Bills of Sale, 1704-1709, Vol. D, p. 67, S. C. Department of Archives.

<sup>11</sup> William Russell had a Warrant, dated Dec. 11, 1694, for 100 acres of land, location unspecified. A. S. Salley, Jr., ed., *Warrants for Land in South Carolina, 1692-1711* (Columbia, 1915), 58. On the same day he received a grant for 100 acres of land, with no more specific description than “The said William Russell may make choice of said 100 acres . . .” where rent had not been paid, etc. Grants Warrants . . . Book G., p. 376, S. C. Department of Archives. He also had a Warrant for 200 acres, Berkeley County, Dec. 16, 1703, (Salley, *Warrants, 1692-1711*, p. 184), but no corresponding grant could be found.

There are certain other records, although collateral and circumstantial, that may have a bearing upon the question of whether or not there was a fort on Windmill Point in 1706. Thus, when the French fleet moved into Charles Town harbor August 27, 1706, and was in position to land troops, James Island was not re-inforced but, on the contrary, the militia company of that Island was moved from there to Charles Town. Then, on August 29, the enemy made an unopposed landing on James Island and burned a house. The James Island militia, under Captain Jonathan Drake, was sent back to drive them off.<sup>12</sup> Finally, on June 16, 1707, when the House acted on a petition for reimbursement from several of those who claimed losses in the attempted invasion, John King, the owner of Windmill Point, was allowed thirty pounds.<sup>13</sup>

Comparing, now, the evidence for and against the existence of a fort on Windmill Point in 1706 or earlier, it must be recognized that some of those writers who maintain the affirmative are well established as historians of South Carolina. This should be given due weight, but at the same time it must be noted that none of their statements in this connection is documented by reference to a record written at the time of the event. In contrast, records in contemporary Journals of the Commons House of Assembly, and in the Statutes, establish as factual that a fort was built on Windmill Point in 1708-1709, and that it was this fort which was named Fort Johnson. The records further show that when the site was pre-empted for this fortification it had been privately owned for at least four years, had a house on it and a growing crop. This record of private ownership possibly explains why the militia did not rendezvous at Windmill Point when attack seemed imminent, and why the French and Spaniards were able to make an uncontested landing on that island.

In summary, the weight of evidence is to the effect that there was no fortification on Windmill Point in 1706 or earlier, and that those histories of South Carolina, and other writings which set forth the date of the building of Fort Johnson as being before 1708, are in error. Perhaps that error was contributed to by an entry in the Journal of the Commons House February 18, 1703. The Carolinians were then quite active in strengthening their defenses, and on that day the House re-

<sup>12</sup> British Public Record Office, C. O. 5-1263, No. 128.

<sup>13</sup>JCHA for that date. It cannot be said with certainty that the damage sustained by King was on his Windmill Point property. Although no record was found of other property owned by him, he had a warrant for 100 acres, location unspecified, in 1701. (Salley, *Warrants, 1692-1711*, 170.) No record of a corresponding grant was found, but this does not mean that he did not obtain such a grant: seemingly, records of warrants are preserved more nearly completely than are those of grants.



solved "That a Close fort be Built on Windmill Poynt for the Security of Charles Towne." It was ordered that Mr. John Ash prepare the necessary bill [to include one other item relating to fortifications], and bring it in on February 22nd. If one read the proceedings no further, it might be assumed that this expressed intent to build the fort was put into effect. Mr. Ash, however, had previously been made responsible for preparing a bill dealing with the Indian trade, and the bill he brought in on the 22nd related to that matter rather than to the proposed fort on Windmill Point. Subsequently on that day the discussion of certain controversial matters reached such an intensity that Mr. Ash and several other members withdrew; and on February 24th the House adjourned for want of sufficient attendance to conduct its affairs.

No other reference to the proposal to build a fort on Windmill Point was found in the Journals of the House or in other possibly relevant documents, until the Journal entries for 1708. And so, it would seem that before then Windmill Point was a farm rather than a fort.

## OCCUPIED BEAUFORT, 1863: A WAR CORRESPONDENT'S VIEW

EDITED BY P. J. STAUDENRAUS \*

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From 1862 to 1865, Noah Brooks, a young, hard-working newspaper reporter, covered wartime Washington, D. C., and subsequently became famous for his reminiscences, first published in 1896 under the title *Washington in Lincoln's Time*. A native of Castine, Maine, Brooks had worked for newspapers in Massachusetts, Illinois, and California before going to Washington in December, 1862, as special correspondent of the Sacramento *Daily Union*. In all, Brooks wrote more than 250 letters covering the activities of the Thirty-Seventh and Thirty-Eighth Congresses, War Department affairs, party politics, and the social life of the capital. In his spare moments he lounged in President Lincoln's study and chatted with the President. The two men first met in Illinois during the Frémont campaign, and in 1858 Brooks covered a portion of the Lincoln-Douglas campaign debates. The President relied on Brook's observations and information, and shortly before he died invited him to be his private secretary. Though Brook's assignment kept him in the capital for the greater part of the Civil War period, he paid a brief visit to Union troops stationed on the Sea Islands in South Carolina. At Beaufort he wrote a careful but now forgotten description of the occupied city and its forlorn inhabitants. Brook's original letter appeared in the Sacramento *Daily Union* on July 16, 1863.

Beaufort, June 17, 1863

### AN ANCIENT SOUTHERN TOWN

The lovely town of Beaufort, embowered in groves of orange and magnolia trees, about twelve miles above Hilton Head, on the Beaufort river . . . has for a century or more been the seat of a wealthy and aristocratic population, and evidences of their taste and love for the beautiful and the sumptuous are yet perceptible in the town, which, though partially dismantled and greatly come to grief, yet shows in its half-ruined and neglected gardens, costly and generously large houses and arbores streets and squares, what manner of people formerly occupied the place.

There is much of the early English style in the architecture of the houses, upon which have been engrafted the features which a Southern

\* Dr. Staudenraus edited "Letters from South Carolina, 1821-1822" in this quarterly, 58 (1957), 209-217.