

# Community L

## *St. Simons Island*

Frances Postell Burns' Island Life Spans  
From Plantation Days to Tourist Mecca



**SHARES CHILDHOOD MEMORIES** — Frances Postell Burns pictured at her home on St. Simons Island talks about her childhood on the island. (News Photo/Bobby Haven)



By CAROLYN O'QUINN  
Community Life Writer

When Frances Postell Burns was a little girl, summer nights on St. Simons were dark and quiet. Born in 1907, she grew up on the island when the only road was of shell and the only light came from the lighthouse and the kerosene lanterns of the occasional house.

As a child, she ran barefooted with her brothers in a forest of pine and oak and palmetto undisturbed by the noise of telephones and automobiles.

The Postell family owned Kelvin Grove, originally a 1,600 acre plantation which included the tracts of land which now make up Bloody Marsh, East Beach, Massengale Park, the King and Prince Hotel, McKinnon Airport and the residential areas of Kelvin Grove, Highland Acres, Wesley Oaks, The Meadows, Oglethorpe Park, Postell Street, Broadway Street and Peachtree Street.

Her father's farm was the land now occupied by the airport. At the age of 4 1/2, she walked from there to school located on Demere Road near the site where the Bloody Marsh Monument stands today. She had to start school early because the county needed 10 students in order to hire a teacher.

She grew up playing boy's games because there were no girls to play with. She played football and baseball and one particular passion was climbing trees on her father's farm — great oaks so high "you could see the lighthouse if you climbed to the top."

Her father had hung a big rope from the tallest oak and one day an uncle challenged her to climb to the top without using her feet. He bet a quarter. "I was up that rope so fast," she remembers. "He thought I couldn't do it."

She recalls with a twinkle in her eye the joke she and her friends played later in the '20s on the tourists who came over in boats to enjoy the beach and visit historic spots such as the Bloody Marsh Monument, erected in 1913.

"A group of us found an old shoe in the bullrushes and we put it on the monument. One of us painted a beautiful sign saying this was Gen. Oglethorpe's shoe which he lost in the Battle of Bloody Marsh."

They hid in the bushes and laughed at the tourists. "We nearly giggled out at the way they exclaimed over it," she said. Finally, just as

the joke was growing old, they watched as a man came along, carefully looked right and left, then picked up the sign and the shoe and went off with it.

As a young woman, she and her friends went to dances in each other's homes, just as her ancestors had danced to a Victrola at the soirees hosted by Captain James Postell at the big house on Kelvin Grove Plantation. Other entertainments were oyster roasts, cookouts and hayrides.

Her family had to move in 1935 when the county bought her father's farm to build the airport. "They told my father to 'take it or else,'" she said firmly. Her father next bought land at Frederica. "We all know what happened to that." Her second home, bought by the federal government, became Fort Frederica National Monument. "They said the same thing the county did."

Mrs. Burns' life spans the island's change from the plantation days to tourist mecca. She was a belle at the opening of the causeway in 1924. She and other young ladies rode a float across in the opening motorcade.

She was a tall slender beauty, remembers a friend, whose children later went to Sunday School with Mrs. Burns at Christ Church, where she was the Sunday School teacher for 10 years.

She married Allen Burns, reared three children and worked at the St. Simons Post Office for 25 years. She was the substitute rural carrier and drove the island roads to deliver mail to everyone's house. It took most of the day since she also sold stamps, envelopes and money orders along the way.

The names of her family appear on street signs and parks in many places on the island including Annie J. Postell Park, the half circle in front of the old Casino (named for her aunt), and Cater and Armstrong streets in Kelvin Grove residential area.

The history of her family's plantation is recorded in two books but research on another, being written on her family by Mrs. Maxfield Parrish, wife of the renowned artist, was lost when Mrs. Parrish died.

Now her family lives in German Village. Her homes and those of her children and their children form a quiet compound bordered with huge moss-hung oaks like the ones she climbed as a child. Her house overlooks a tidal creek and the

marsh, a scene charmingly reproduced on a canvas which hangs in her living room. The oil painting is hers, although she's never had a lesson.

At 83, she is still vigorous and active and until last year, enjoyed bowling and playing a "gut bucket" in the Fantastics, a local washboard band that performed at meetings, nursing homes and events in surrounding counties.

Her days are full with activities of numerous civic and historical groups. She frequently donates her time in the office of the Coastal Georgia Historical Society. There, in the museum at the lighthouse, are gifts from her family that were new when gentlemen wore lace at the knee.

She's traveled to foreign lands but still loves St. Simons best. She said that growing up here was wonderful. "We didn't appreciate it then."





**LANDMARK EVENT** — The former Frances Postell (second from left) shown in an official photo of the St. Simons causeway opening in 1924.