

The History of Little St. Simons Island under the Ownership of the Berolzheimer Family

[The copy that I have is marked "George Owens" (*possible author in about 1975*) with a note "Captain Doug - Sorry it's so late." Herman Douglas Taylor was born Mar 2,1883, married my grandmother, Alberta Gould Hasell, on Apr 10,1918. He died on Dec 14, 1977. Converted by Jim Bruce to MS Word format]

Introduction

Much of the history of Little St. Simons Island (LSSI) can be told in the history of its buildings, as well as from the events that took place here and the personalities connected with the island in the period 1900-1971. The one living person who is in a position to relate essentially the entire history during this period is Captain Herman Douglas Taylor, for 60 years the caretaker of LSSI, and now retired and believed to be about 92 years old. Cap'n Doug, as he is affectionately known by family and friends, took part in the construction of almost all the existing physical facilities on the island, as well as being present at almost all the noteworthy events that have taken place. As the Captain of a succession of worthy vessels belonging to the island, he for many years transported lumber, materials, supplies, food, plus the guests and several generations of the Berolzheimer family to and from the island. Thus it was felt by the current generation of the family that the history of the island should be written and compiled from Cap'n Doug's memories and narratives concerning his experiences. Accordingly the writer has tried inasmuch as possible to preserve the flavor of Cap'n Doug's narrative, without "putting words in his mouth". In some cases it was felt necessary to augment or clarify information given by Cap'n Doug with information from other sources and persons around the St. Simons Island area. At many times during the writer's interviews with Cap'n Doug, the Cap'n would preface his remarks by the statement "Dates ? I don't remember any dates. Never thought I'd have any use for them". This is a fitting statement for most of the information in the history. Dates given have usually been inferred from the time in relation to some other event for which the date was known, and thus should be considered only accurate to within about 2 or 3 years either way.

Early History - The Old House and the Bungalow

Apparently, before about 1900, the island had been owned for some time by Lady Lee of England. She was the daughter of Pierce Butler, whose predecessors were the original landed gentry-planters on Big St. Simons, and whose name is still preserved at their ancestral home, Butler's Point. Butler had at one time grown cotton on LSSI. On Little St. Simons, Lady Lee had stayed at a place known simply as "The Old House". It was located on "House Creek" at the edge of the woods on the West side, overlooking the marsh (Approximately 1-1/2 miles due North of the present settlement).

This house was completely destroyed by the great 1898 hurricane, and today only the chimney remains to mark the spot. At the time of this hurricane Cap'n Doug was 19 years old and lived with his family at the site of old Frederica Town and Fort. He remembers the storm as follows : "A wind from the Northeast blew a gale for two weeks. Then a squall came in from the East." The water came up so high on Big St. Simons that it brought a sea buoy up into the woods, and in fact was even with the piazza floor at Old-Fort Frederica.

Around 1900, a Mr. O.F. Chichester was doing some fishing around the

South End of LSSI. He was at that time the Southern Manager of Eagle Pencil Company(which was owned by the Berolzheimer family in part).

Being a lumber man by profession, Chichester noticed that a great many cedar trees were blown down on LSSI (from the 1898 storm). He knew the value of this timber, since pencil slats were, and still are, made of cedar. After some investigation, Eagle Pencil was able to negotiate the purchase of the island of Little St. Simons from Lady Lee for \$12000. At that time Cap'n Doug Taylor was hired to haul the timber from LSSI to the old mill near Frederica Town. His pay was \$2 a day, and it took about 5 years to complete the cleanup of the downed timber. Apparently, the following winter Mr. Philip Berolzheimer came down and spent some time hunting and fishing. So much did he like the island that he bought it outright from the Eagle Pencil Company for \$25,000. There being at that time no place to stay on the island, he soon had Cap'n Doug hauling logs to a protected site on the South end of the island, located up a deep-water creek. There they erected a log cabin which came to be known as the bungalow, which served as a base of operations for duck hunting, etc. Soon Mr. Berolzheimer began spending every Christmas season there, sometimes bringing his entire family and staying as much as two months. Cap'n

Doug remembers that Charlie Adler, Mr. Berolzheimer's brother-in-law, was a great favorite of the family. He was the owner of Ivory Woolen Mills, and when he came he would spend most of every day off hunting with Cap'n Doug.

Living at the bungalow was something less than easy. There was no horse, no wagon, no automobile. Everything, including firewood, had to be brought in by boat to the landing site on the creek, where it was wheeled up to the bungalow on a cart and a walkway made of planks. To go duck hunting, Mr. B. would get up at 4 AM, take the boat about 6 miles around to Mosquito Creek, and then walk about 2 miles through the woods to the natural ponds on the North End. At this time there no deer on LSSI , and thus rabbits and waterfowl were the only source of fresh meat available on the island. Often Cap'n Doug would take some rabbits or ducks over to the store on Big SSI, to sell them in return of supplies. The trip for supplies was a full day's affair: they would take the boat over to the site of the "German Village", then walk 3 miles to Frederica Town and rent a buggy, and then drive 6 miles to the general store at the site of the "old mill" (This was at Gascoigne's Bluff, present site of St. Simons Boating Club Marina, near where the causeway comes on the island). Cap'n Doug relates that this mill site was a big commercial center, since the mill employed 500 people. "The mill was a big 'double decker'". There was a steamboat dock there where the supplies care in. The general store had "everything from a needle to a locomotive" in Cap'n Doug's words, as well as several skilled mechanics who could fix just about anything.

Transportation Facilities (Boats)

Paralleling the history of the island was the history of a series of boats piloted by Cap'n Doug, Although some of these are only dimly remembered, some of them are worthy of mention. The first boat, apparently, was one named the "Frederica". Cap'n Doug essentially built this boat; originally it had been an old oyster barge. Cap'n put a bow and stern on this structure, and installed a 40 hp "Standard" engine. Apparently it could make a speed of about 8 mph, since Cap'n Doug remembers that he could make the 16 mile round trip from Frederica around to the island in about 2 hours. When Mr. Berolzheimer and friends would arrive at Jacksonville via steamer from New York, Cap'n Doug would pick then up in the "Frederica".

Also during this period, there was a long, narrow boat named the "Teal". The "Teal" was a faster boat and used mainly for fast transportation to and from Brunswick.

The first boat belonging to the island was a little boat named the "Hettie", a one-cylinder "pop" boat. It was a narrow, batteau-type boat with a small inboard engine. This boat had originally belonged to Alf Hay, who drowned and later the boat was sold to Cap'n Doug for \$25.

Around 1930 a new "Frederica" was built to replace the original one. Cap'n Doug remembers it as being about 65 feet long and able to carry a large number of passengers.

Then came the Baby Helen, named after Helen Berolzheimer. Now we have the Helen II. And the SeaBreeze, a speedboat.

The Hunting Lodge -The 1910's and 1920's

Probably sometime between 1905 and 1910, Mr. B. began to become dissatisfied with the facilities at the Bungalow. Not only was there little access to the rest of the island; also the Bungalow was cold and just plain inconvenient. Thus it was decided to build a new hunting lodge more nearly in the center of the island, on Mosquito Creek. Soon afterward the "Pullman" cabin was built to accommodate guests who came to hunt. Previously guests had to sleep out in the yard. Also at that time the original dock was built by Cap'n Doug. He used a jet pump to displace the mud at the bottom of the creek and thereby set the pilings for the dock. The same technique was used in building the original bridge over to the "Rainbow" area south of Mosquito Creek; Cap'n Doug remembers that he used logs from the cabbage palmetto for this bridge.

Sometime during the period 1900-1910 Mr. Berolzheimer got the idea of stocking the island with deer for hunting purposes. The original stocking of German Fallow Deer was made from stock from the New York Bronx Zoo. The animals were shipped down via steamboat to Brunswick. Then Cap'n Doug would have them unloaded in their crates into the old lighter, a barge owned by the island. He would then take them over to the island, and unload them into a cattle pen on Mosquito Creek. Here they would be fed and allowed to become acclimated before being released about two weeks later. The deer adapted to the island well, and hunting became practicable a few years later. For a while, Mr. B. followed the practice of replacing each deer shot by new stock imported from New York. Also around this time Mr. B. was able to import a few rare white

Fallow Deere from a doctor's estate in Michigan, for which he paid as much as \$250 a head. These also propagated well and are now in abundance on the island.

At about this same time Mr. B. also became interested in other, rarer animals, and stockings were made of elk, English red deer, small Japanese deer, and a variety of deer known as the sacred deer of India, the Barasings. Unfortunately, none of these rarer species remains today due to an epidemic of screwworm in the 1930's. At one time the elk herd reached 25 in number and was led by a bull elk known as Nikki who was in the habit of chasing anyone who came near him up the nearest tree.

By about 1920, apparently, Mr. B. had established a tradition of giving big hunts during the winter for his friends, and political and business associates. These included numerous political bosses from New York's Tammany Hall, and later such notables as Governor Talmadge of Georgia. The year 1921 saw the reign of the "nine bandits", and 1922, the band of eight, both of which parties are immortalized in picture-story books in the hunting lodge. These were the halcyon days of American prosperity prevailing after World War I. Usually after the guests were gone, the rest of the family would come down and spend a month or so.

About this time there were three tragic incidents. The first of these was the death of Mr. Alfred Hay. Hay, an Englishman, was remembered by Cap'n Doug as a fine newspaperman, as well as a distant cousin of his. Apparently around 1916 he was a guest on the island. One day Mr. B. invited Hay to go into Brunswick with him. According to Cap'n Doug, Hay got too liquored up in preparation for the trip, and while moving the boat away from the dock, he fell into the creek. He must have struck his head and drowned; it was a bitterly cold winter day. It was not until 42 days later that his body was found, near the present Rainbow Bridge.

Sometime after this a caretaker known only as Mr. Burt killed himself down at the South End, for reasons unknown. This must have been sometime after 1922 since his picture appears in the logbook of the Band of Eight.

Sometime after this Cap'n Doug hired a Negro helper named Millard Stewart. He stayed 4 years, and then one day during a crossing, drowned in Lawrence Creek. His death was attributed to being "too liquored up" by Cap'n Doug.

Also during the 1920's Mr. B. kept a special flock of chickens on the

island which he raised especially for their fine eating qualities. It was said that when he was giving a banquet at his home in New York City, he would have a number of birds killed, iced down, and shipped to him for the feast. About 1927 the house known as Helen's house was built, as her wedding present from Mr. B. When the writer asked Cap'n Doug if this was a tabby house, Cap'n Doug replied "No, this was built of stucco, ... but old man Berolzheimer was built of tabby," At the same time this house was built, the deep well behind the lodge was dug, and the swimming pool was built.

It is worthy of note that the causeway onto Big St. Simons Island was built in 1924, which markedly improved the accessibility of that island to outsiders.

The 1930's

The 1930's saw many physical improvements made to the island. Originally Cap'n Doug had built the first dike at the north end by hand, "with a shovel, a wheelbarrow, and a darkie", In 1930 a new dike to the beach was built using a dragline, or power shovel. This gave access to the access to the beach on a dry road. Also several other dikes were built or improved at the north end of the island, which made it possible to impound the tidal inflow of salt water and thus create the "duck ponds".

The 1930's also saw the ravages wrought by the screwworm epidemic. This arose indirectly as a result of the "dust bowl" in Texas and Oklahoma. Starving cattle were shipped back East as a desperate measure to save them; and they brought the screwworm disease with them. This dread disease was spread by a type of fly, which laid its eggs in open sores of animals such as cattle and deer. The screwworm had disastrous effects on the cattle and wildlife on the island, wiping out the population of exotic animals, as mentioned above. Cap'n Doug did everything he could to catch the afflicted animals; he would put benzene on the sores to kill the fly larva, and then pine tar to seal off the wound. Apparently these efforts were successful in stemming the tide of the epidemic, until the screwworm was wiped out by a miracle of science. Sterilized male flies were introduced, which eventually was successful in eliminating flies entirely.

In 1932 an outside contractor was brought in to build the timber bulk-heading along about 200 yards of the shoreline of the creek at the settlement. At the same time a new dock was built, which is the one still in use today. Also at that time the Rainbow Bridge was rebuilt.

During the era of prohibition, steps were taken by the island to insure a good supply of liquid refreshment. Captain Doug proudly relates that he once bought 200 gallons of good, though illegal, whiskey on St. Simons Island. He put this up into 10 gallon kegs, smuggled it onto the island past the eyes of some of the more prudish members of the family, and stored it in the loft above the barn. Cap'n Doug also reports that he once took a group down to Miami on the Frederica, from where they embarked to Cuba and brought back a substantial supply of Bacardi rum.

The 1940's

As a matter of interest, the writer happened to find out that the present librarian at St. Simons Village Library took the 1940 census here. The total population of the four islands of St. Simons, Little St. Simons, Sea Island, and Jekyll Island at that time was 1,998.

During the War years, 1942-1946, the Coast Guard or some other branch took up residence on the island, due to its strategic position of being one of the easternmost points of land jutting out into the Atlantic. Apparently they were looking out for German U-Boats, and the writer heard one report that a spy was once captured coming ashore. Cap'n Doug, however, denies that this was true.

Recent History [*Thru 1975*]

Cap'n Doug did not really have a lot to say about the past two decades. Presumably the tradition of having guests for hunting and fishing continued, as it still does today by the current generation of the family. Not much in the way of substantial physical additions or alterations were made to serve as landmarks in this period.