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The Village of Little River

In the earliest days the Little River area was part of a very large political division known as Craven County. After the time of the Lords Proprietors when there were royal governors, it was part of Georgetown Judicial District, which covered the present-day counties of Georgetown, Horry, Marion and Dillon and included most of present-day Williamsburg and Florence counties. This huge area was divided into parishes which also served as the local voting precincts. All Saints Parish extended from Georgetown to the Cape Fear River originally, but later the province line was its upper boundary. All of the area from the ocean to the Waccamaw River fell within this parish, which included the village of Little River.

The village of Little River can trace its history back to 1734. It was then that a “young gentleman” from England recorded in his diary that he had stayed at Ash’s, or Little River, while traveling through the area.

In 1740, on his way to Savannah, Georgia, Rev. George Whitefield, an English Anglican preacher, apparently visited Ash’s inn also and recorded the following entries in his diary:

“Tuesday, Jan. 1, 1740. Rode about ten miles, where we baited [ate], met with one who I had great reason to believe was a child of God. It grieved me that I could stay no longer, but being in haste, we passed over a half-mile ferry. About sunset, we came to a tavern, five miles within the province of South Carolina. Here I immediately perceived the people were more polite than those we generally met with, but I believe the people of the house wished I had not come to be their guest that night; for, it being New Year’s Day, several of the neighbors were met together to divert themselves by dancing country dances.

By the advice of my companions, I went in amongst them whilst a woman was dancing a jig. At my first entrance I endeavoured to shew the folly of such entertainments, and to convince her how well-pleased the devil was at every step she took. For some time she endeavoured to outbrave me; neither fiddler nor she desisted, but at least she gave over and the musician laid aside his instrument... .

All were soon put to silence, and were, for some time, so overawed, that after I had discoursed with them on the nature of baptism and the necessity of being born again...I baptized, at their entreaty, one of their children, and prayed afterwards, as I was enabled, and as the circumstances of the company required...but the people were so bent on their pleasure, that notwithstanding all that had been said, after I had gone to bed, I heard their music and dancing resume.

Wednesday, Jan. 2. Rose very early, prayed, sang a hymn and gave a sharp reproof to the dancers who were very attentive, and took it in good part. At break of day, we mounted our horses, and, I think, never had a more pleasant journey. For nearly twenty miles we rode over a beautiful bay as plain as a terrace walk, and as we passed along

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were wonderfully delighted to see the porpoises taking their pastime, and hear, as it were, shore resounding to shore the praises of Him Who hath set bounds to the sea that it cannot pass. ...At night we intended to call at a gentleman's house, where we had been recommended, about forty miles distant... .”

(A highway marker south of Little River commemorates this visit.)

The tavern where Whitefield lodged was probably that of Thomas Ash. Ash received a land grant for 350 acres on June 19, 1733. It is believed that he operated an inn or halfway house (midway between Cape Fear and Winyah Bay). The inn is believed to have been located in the vicinity of present day Nixon's Cross Roads, in the Little River area.

During the Revolutionary War, members of the Little River Committee of Safety at one time or another were Dennis Hankins, Josias Allston, Samuel Dwight, Francis Allston, John Allston, Jr., Isaac Marion, William Pierce, Alexander Dunn, Samuel Price, Michel Bellune, and Daniel Morrall. Empowered by the General Committee in Charleston, these constituted the only governing body of the area in the days before a state government could take hold. They could require local residents to sign an oath of allegiance to the new government to show opposition to the English Crown.

In 1791 President George Washington decided to tour the southern states. In his diary Washington stated, *“In this tour I was accompanied by Major Jackson, my equipage and attendance consisted of a Chariot & four horses drove in hand – a light baggage wagon and two horses – four saddle horses besides a led one for myself and five – to wit – my Valet de Chambre, two footmen, Coachman & postilion.”* The outriders wore bright livery of red and white which gave a touch of distinction to the procession. His carriage was described as a “white chariot”.

Washington went on to record, *“Wednesday 27th. Breakfasted at Willm. Gause's a little out of the direct Road 14 Miles--crossed the boundary line between No. & South Carolina abt. half after 12 oclock which is 10 miles from Gauses. Dined at a private house (one Cochrans) about 2 miles farther and lodged at Mr. Vareens 14 Miles more and 2 Miles short of the long bay. To this house we were directed as a Tavern, but the proprietor of it either did not keep one, or would not acknowledge it. We therefore were en[ter]tained (& very kindly) without being able to make compensation.”*

Washington had left William Gause's at Ocean Isle, NC and entered South Carolina just north of Little River on April 27, 1791 where he dined with a Revolutionary War veteran named James G. Cochran who resided in Little River. A bay behind the Food Lion store (in 2005) in Little River is named “Cochran's Bay”. He was traveling the well established coastal road which had become known as the King's Highway.

Just south of present day North Myrtle Beach he lodged overnight with either Jeremiah Vereen, Jr. or Sr. Vereen resided approximately two miles north of Singleton Swash. The next day Vereen guided the President safely across Singleton Swash. From there they traveled down the strand for 16 miles and then turned inland and went 5 more miles

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to the home of George Pawley which was probably inland of the area that is present day Surfside Beach.

Washington wrote, "*Thursday 28th. Mr. Vareen piloted us across the Swash (which at high water is impassable, & at times, by the shifting of the Sands is dangerous) on to the long Beach of the Ocean; and it being at a proper time of the tide we passed along it with ease and celerity to the place of quitting it which is estimated 16 miles. Five Miles farther we got dinner & fed our horses at a Mr. Pauleys a private house, no public one being on the road; and being met on the Road, & kindly invited by a Docter flagg to his house, we lodged there; it being about 10 miles from Pauleys & 33 from Vareens.*"

In 1826, Robert Mills, America's first native born trained architect, and born in Charleston, SC, described the village of Little River as follows: "*There is another settlement made on Little river near the seaboard of about 25 persons, who carry on a considerable trade in lumber, pitch, tar, &c. ... Little river admits vessels drawing 6 or 7 feet water up into the harbor, 4 miles from its mouth. There is a little difficulty at the entrance, but the harbor is perfectly safe from the effects of storms.*"

In 1868 an Horry correspondent for *The Marion (SC) Star* [December 16] who signed himself Waccamaw wrote that Little River Village was "*a flourishing commercial place, that bids fair to become of great importance in the industrial and commercial interest of Horry and of the adjoining counties in North Carolina. [It contained] four stores, one steam saw mill, two gum stills, one academy, church, no jail (!) and a curiosity, in a new-fangled 'Pinder Picking machine... Vessels of one hundred and fifty tons burden can come up to the village, and so make regular trips between this place and Northern cities, as well as to the West Indies. A large Schooner, commanded by Capt. Davis was taking on cargo for New York, during our visit. ... Prominent among the characteristics of the Little River people is their energy and hospitality, two traits ever found among those who have commercial intercourses with other parts of the world.*"

In that same 1868 article, Waccamaw went on to describe the local food in a very favorable light by saying, "*These [mullet], with the oysters, that were abundant, and the ducks, of which quite a number were killed, to appetites already good, and highly braced by the buoyant ocean breeze, were luxuries that courted indulgence. The gain per cent during the period of two weeks, was so great that serious thoughts, of having to send some of the party to Wilmington to be weighed, were in contemplation.*"

References:

C. B. Berry

Catherine H. Lewis