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Horry County Historical Society

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Calendar Events:

- **HCHS Designer Showhouse,**
April 8-April 23, 2006
- **Spring Tour**
To be announced
- **Regular Meeting**
July 10, 2006,
7:30 p.m.
- **Regular Meeting,**
October 9, 2006,
7:30 pm

The Independent Republic Quarterly

Submit materials and comments for the newsletter to:

The Editor,
The Independent Republic Quarterly
606 Main Street
Conway, SC
29526-4340

Telephone:
843.488.1966

E-mail:
history@sccoast.net

Web Site:
<http://www.hchsonline.org>

Fort Randall at Little River Neck

During the War Between the States, the Union's North Atlantic Blockading Squadron was very active in the Little River inlet area. As a result, the need for protection from invading Union forces was deemed necessary by the Confederate authorities. The remains of a Confederate battery, Fort Randall, as it came to be called, is located on the eastern end of Little River Neck on property currently known as Tilghman Point. Fort Randall is named for Capt. Thomas Randall, who owned the property at the time it was built.

The Randall plantation home was located several hundred feet from the fort. He became a large landowner in the community and owned 85 slaves in 1860.¹

Capt. Randall was born in Rochester, Mass. on November 25, 1791. When he died in 1872, he was buried at Cedar Creek Cemetery.²

The Confederate fort served a dual purpose of protecting the village of Little River and the surrounding countryside from invasion and providing a safe haven for blockade runners.³ As the Union's blockade was tightened around Charleston, S.C. and Wilmington, N.C., Little River Inlet served as an alternative port for the blockade runners which were bringing in valuable supplies for the besieged Confederacy.

Fort Randall was in existence by March, 1861, for at that time Capt. Thomas West Daggett, who was in command of the Waccamaw Light Artillery, was trying to lodge his men in Fort Randall and in Fort Ward,⁴ which is believed to have been in the Murrells Inlet area. Capt. Daggett, also a native of

Mass., was an engineer who had moved to South Carolina. He used his skills to build and operate rice mills on the Waccamaw Neck. When war broke out, he joined the Confederate forces and was assigned charge of the coastal defenses from Winyah Bay to Little River Inlet.

Like Battery White, which is located on Belle Isle just outside Georgetown on Winyah Bay, Battery Randall used earthen works for fortification. Records indicate that the battery consisted of a mote approximately 10' broad x 5' deep with a parapet and a blockhouse which was pierced so the defenders could fire without being exposed.⁵

Capt. Daggett armed Fort Randall with two 6-pounder cannons and inquired if he should also add the 12-pounders which were in the mill yard at Laurel Hill Plantation. In addition to the blockhouse, he also built a munitions magazine to store ammunition and arms.⁶

Federal naval records tell us that there were considerable blockade running activities in the Little River Inlet area. Acting Volunteer Lt. George W. Browne, commander of the *U.S. Bark Fernandina* off Wilmington reported on December 14, 1861, "*Sir: I have to report that on the evening of the 13th instant, off Little River Inlet, North [sic] Carolina, I observed numerous fires. Some forty were counted in one place, and several others in scattered positions of from 1 to 2 miles apart along the coast. At 7 p.m. I tacked and stood in to reconnoiter. On nearing the shore I observed several bodies of men, which*

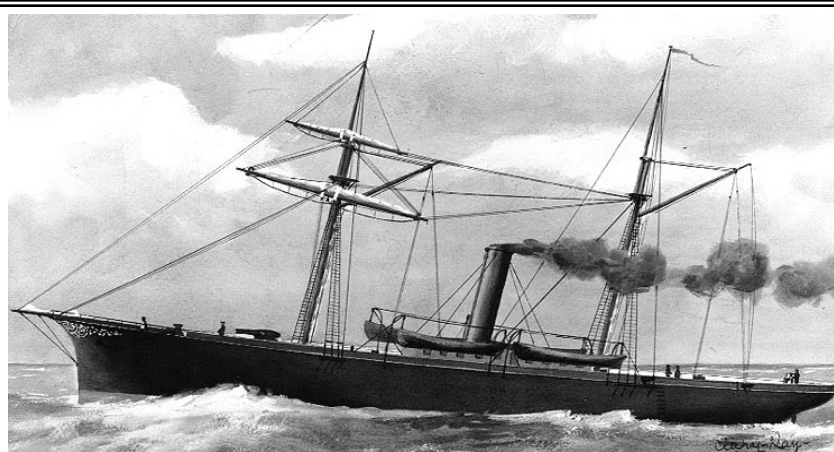
Fort Randall, see Page 2

Fort Randall, from Page 1

caused me to believe there was an encampment of Confederate troops and the distant fires were their picket guard. After having burned a preparatory signal and receiving no answer, I opened fire with my starboard battery on the men and fired, several of the shots being heard to strike some hard substance very distinctly. At this time the vessel was within 700 yards of the beach in 4 fathoms of water; could see the men on shore running plainly. After firing three rounds with the starboard battery, tacked ship and fired one round of shot and one shell from port battery. By this time the fires were mostly extinguished. Secured the batteries and proceeded on our course. From the appearance of things, I am now led to believe the fires were signals for some vessel endeavoring to run a cargo. Having stood close in during the morning, and seen several men on the beach, they perhaps supposed I was the vessel expected, or one wishing to run the blockade”⁷

It should be mentioned that some U.S. naval reports erroneously referred to Little River Inlet as being in North Carolina instead of South Carolina. The state line is located just north of the mouth of the inlet.

Lieutenant E. Hooker, Commanding the *USS Victoria*, while on an expedition to Little River in search of blockade runners, reported on January 2, 1863, “Sir: I have to report my coal as reduced to 10 tons. I have also to report that I have received information by contrabands, four of whom came to my ship December 30, that there were two schooners in Little River, nearly or quite loaded for sea, and also one in Shallotte in the same condition. On the afternoon of the 31st a sail was discovered inside, which we thought was working down to Little River Bar. We soon, however, lost sight of her. At sunset I got underway and proceeded to Little River and lay off and on for a while. At 8 p.m. I came to anchor and sent a boat on shore. At the first point of landing they were met by cavalry pickets and retired. They then entered the river and proceeded several miles up the river without, however, discovering anything except more cavalry pickets. The boat returned to the ship at 7 o’clock a.m., January 1, and I returned to my anchorage. The schooners in Little River are the *Argyle* and *James Bailey*. At high water there is about 9 feet on Little River Bar.”⁸



The USS Monticello (1861-1865), Photo #NH60661 by Clary Ray
The USS Monticello was captained by Lt. William B. Cushing, USN from 1863-1865. It took part in the Union blockade of Little River Inlet and Murrells Inlet, S.C.

It is clear from the surviving records of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron that Little River was used by blockade runners. A document from Confederate Major A.B. Magruder of Wilmington, N.C. states, “Run into the mouth of Little River, a small stream of _ feet water, near the boundary line of North and South Carolina, emptying into the Atlantic about 30 or 40 miles below Cape Fear. It is not down on the charts nor on the coast survey, and its existence even – certainly its harbor and anchorage ground – is hardly known to any Yankee. Communications from a little

village or post-office called Little River, about 4 or 6 miles from the mouth, are readily had with the interior by country roads, etc., with Charleston and Wilmington. A pilot can be had at Wilmington to meet and bring in vessels from the coast, and rosin and turpentine in any quantity can be procured for return cargo; also cotton, lumber, etc.”⁹

Another report in the Official

Records of the Union and Confederate Navies tells of Lt. William Barker Cushing (1842-1875) commanding the *Home*, a captured schooner which he had disguised as an English blockade runner. He attempted the capture of some harbor pilots in Wilmington but failed. Having heard of a pilot station at Little River, he then sailed there to try his luck. This venture resulted in an attack on Fort Randall.

In Cushing’s report dated January 8, 1863, he states, “Sir: I have the honor to report that I failed to capture the Wilmington pilots where I desired to act. Having learned, however, that there was a pilot station at Little River, 30 miles below Fort Caswell, I made sail for that point and reached it on the morning of the 5th. At 8 o’clock at night I crossed the bar with three cutters and twenty-five men, and proceeded up the river. My object was to look for pilots, and also to find some schooners supposed to be inside. About a mile from the mouth the enemy gave us a volley of musketry from a bluff on the left. I beached the boats at once, formed my men about 200 yards from the enemy’s position, and gave the order, ‘forward; double

Fort Randall, see Page 3

Fort Randall, from Page 2

quick; charge.' Without firing a musket the men moved forward, and when we got clear of the woods I saw a fort in front and the light of the camp fires. Knowing that the rebels were ignorant of our numbers, I charged with the bayonet and captured their works, going over one side as they escaped over the other. I found the fort an earthwork, surrounded by a ditch about

"At the enemy we went, yelling like demons, and coming out into the open space saw, by the light of a camp fire, an earthwork looming up in front." —Lt. William B. Cushing

10 feet broad by 5 deep. Inside was a blockhouse pierced for musketry. No guns were mounted. I learn[ed] that it was held by one company of infantry. The enemy left in such haste that their stores, clothing, ammunition, and a portion of their arms were captured. I destroyed all that I could not bring away. I went a short distance farther up the river; had another skirmish; did not see the schooners; got out of ammunition and returned with the loss of but one man shot in the leg. In conclusion, I beg leave to state that officers and men behaved nobly. Acting Master's Mates Valentine and Hicks were with me. Acting Master Savage, commanding mortar schooner *Matthew Vassar*, furnished me with two boats and a portion of the men... P.S. — The fort was in South Carolina, 1 mile from the border line."¹⁰

Apparently, the cannons that had been mounted in 1861 were relocated to more strategic locations to suit General Lee's plan for coastal defense. This left Little River without the benefit of heavy artillery protection.¹¹

According to Cushing's biography, years after the altercation he supposedly wrote, "At the enemy we went, yelling like demons, and coming out into the open space saw, by the light of a camp fire, an earthwork looming up in front. It was no time to turn back, another yell and we were through the ditch and over the para-

pet, sole possessors of a fort and blockhouse, from which the frightened garrison five times our numbers, had run away deceived by our boldness into the belief that they not we were the surprised party."¹²

One month and five days after Cushing's attack on Fort Randall, another incident is reported in the area which mentions Fort Randall and gives a picture of the activities there.

James C. Gibney and George Smith, both Acting Ensigns aboard the *USS Maratanza* off Little River reported, "Sir: In obedience to your order to make reconnoissance up Little River, and to ascertain if there were any vessels up the river, on the 9th instant at 7:30 p.m. we left the ship in the launch, the crew properly armed and equipped for such an enterprise, and accompanied by a boat and crew from the schooner *Matthew Vassar*, moved inshore in a northeasterly direction. After some delay in finding the channel we eventually succeeded and crossed the bar, on which we found 6 feet of water, it being about mid tide. After crossing the bar, and depending on the officer in charge of the boat from the *Matthew Vassar* (who had been up the river before) for

Fort Randall, see Page 4



Battery Randall

Fort Randall, from Page 3

instructions how to proceed, we found him totally, deficient of any knowledge of the course of the channel, and consequently had to depend wholly on our own resources; in doing so, we got into a false channel, and in retracing our way we discovered a boat with five men in her, pulling up the river. When about 100 yards off we hailed them and ordered them to come alongside, but they being near the shore, and taking the alarm, three of them jumped overboard and succeeded in making their escape. We immediately landed a party and sent them in pursuit, but owing to the facilities the place afforded for secreting themselves, we failed in capturing them. In the captured boat were two men named, respectively, G.W. Hewett and Stephen Hewett, natives of North Carolina, who surrendered as prisoners without resistance. We found also in the boat 5 muskets, 23 each of jackets, caps, drawers, shirts, stockings, 23 pair of shoes and 1 dozen blankets, intended for the use of a company of infantry stationed at this place. From what appeared to us to be very reliable statements, made by the prisoners (that there was one company of infantry and one of cavalry, about 175 men in all stationed at a small fort about one-half mile up the river from where we were then, the fugitives having alarmed the garrison, as we saw by their firing muskets and rockets), we did not deem it prudent to proceed up the river any farther, so started on our return. In running out of the inlet, sounding as we came, we found from 2 to 3 fathoms of water in mid-channel, and on the bar at 11 o'clock, it being high tide, we found 10 feet of water. We returned to the ship at 12 midnight, not being entirely successful in accomplishing the object of our enterprise.”¹³

In 2006, all that remains of Fort Randall is a clearly defined footprint of the fortification. The site has been respected and well preserved although a portion of the earthen works has begun to erode. The site still commands a spectacular view of Little River Inlet as it meets the Atlantic Ocean.

¹1860 Slave Schedules of Horry County, S.C.

²Berry, C.B., The Independent Republic Quarterly, Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 13.

³C.B. Berry, The Sun News, Area History column, June 27, 1992.

⁴Daggett to Col. Charleston Alston, Jr., March 23, 1861, Board of Ordinance Papers, S.C. Archives.

⁵Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies, Series I, Vol. 8, pp. 403-404.

⁶Daggett to Col. Charleston Alston, Jr., March 23, 1861, Board of Ordinance Papers, S.C. Archives.

⁷Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies, Series I, Vol. 6, pp. 473-474.

⁸Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies, Series I, Vol. 8, p. 397.

⁹*Ibid*, p. 441.

¹⁰*Ibid*, pp. 403-404.

¹¹Rogers, George C. Jr., The History of Georgetown County, South Carolina, 1970, p. 393.

¹²Roske, Ralph J. and Charles Van Doren, Lincoln's Commando: The Biography of Commander W. B. Cushing, U.S.N., Harper and Brothers, N.Y., 1957, p. 144.

¹³Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies, Series I, Vol. 8, pp. 529-530.

✍ J. Benjamin Burroughs, research specialist in Coastal Carolina University's Burroughs and Chapin Center for Marine and Wetland Studies.

The 2006 HCHS Spring Tour

will encompass the Little River area,
including Waties Island.

More information is forthcoming.

Tilghman Point

Located on the eastern end of Little River Neck, Tilghman Point is the location of several historical points of interest: the Allston Plantation, the Randall Plantation, Fort Randall and the Tilghman houses.

Horace Tilghman, Sr. purchased this property in the 1920s from Lillian Bessent Randall, widow of Louis H. Randall who was the grandson of Capt. Thomas Randall. Tracts were added to this property that eventually amounted to 3,854 acres in Little River Neck, including 232 acres across the river in Colkin's Neck.

After Tilghman's purchase, the area known as the Battery, in the vicinity of Fort Randall, came to be called Tilghman Point.

The Intracoastal Waterway

Capt. Thomas C. Dunn was an ex-Captain of the Yankee Navy and took part in the blockade of Fort Randall during the War Between the States. Afterwards, he settled there.

He was an energetic visionary who could see Little River as a major port and planned a canal to connect Little River with the Waccamaw River around 1870.

His plan was a feasible undertaking since Little River and the Waccamaw River are only five or six miles apart at one point. This would have created a safe inland waterway for shipping from Little River to Georgetown on Winyah Bay. Inland Horry District had used Conwayborough (Conway) as the river port where produce was sent first to Georgetown and then to destinations in Charleston or in northern ports.

Since most of the commerce was with northern businesses, the development of this waterway and of the Little River port would have provided a shipping point much closer than either Georgetown or Charleston. Dunn became distracted by politics and his plan was never carried out.

In 1930, Dunn's dream to connect Little River with the interior of the county by waterway became a reality. The U. S. Corps of Engineers began to acquire rights of way through the county for an Intracoastal Waterway. The people of Conway argued strongly for following the plan laid down by Dunn to connect Little River to the Waccamaw River by canal, but the Corps of Engineers opted to dig a new waterway 90 feet wide and eight feet deep through high ground from Little River to Socastee Swamp. This section completed the project from New England to Florida.

On April 11, 1936, there was a ceremonial opening at the Socastee Swing-span Bridge.

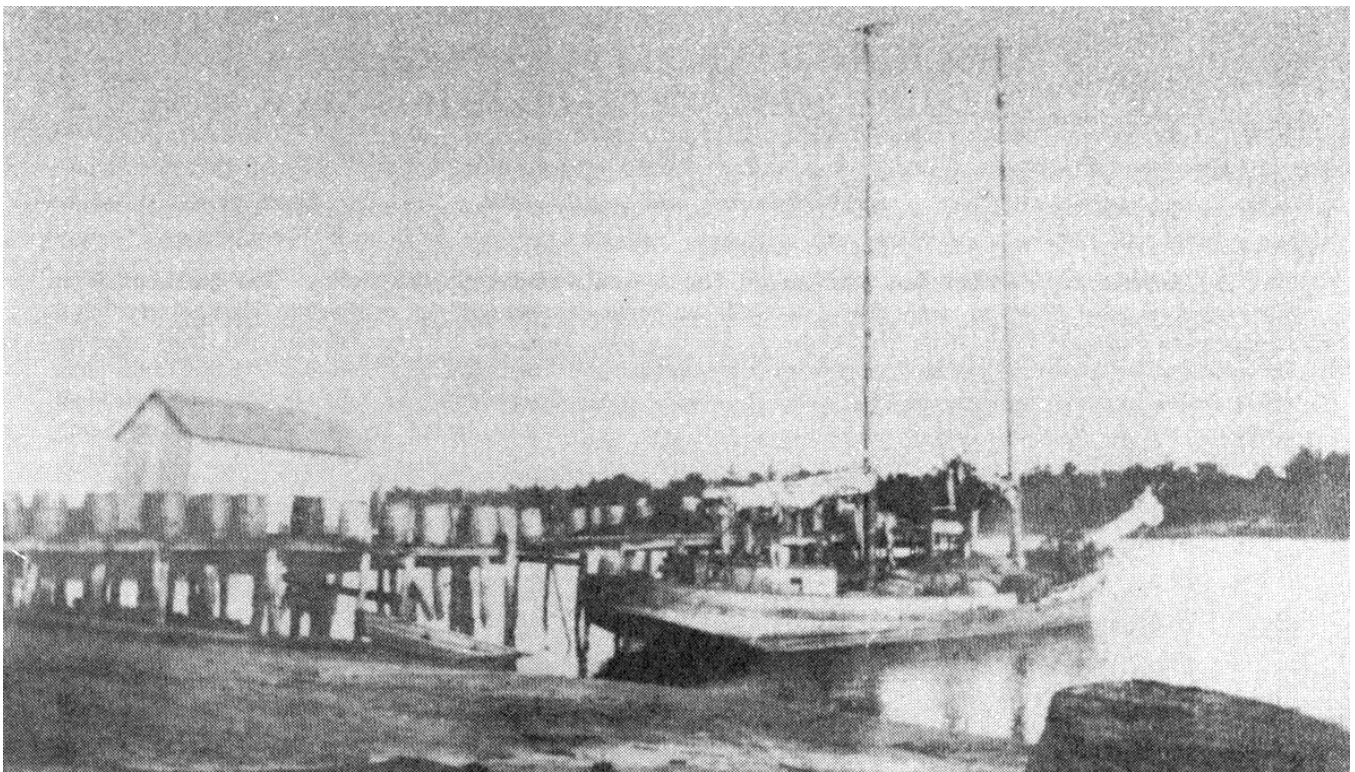
Several authors who have written of traveling the Intracoastal Waterway in its entirety have described the section along Socastee Creek and the Waccamaw River in southern Horry County as one of the most beautiful sections in its entire length.

✍ *J. Benjamin Burroughs and Catherine H. Lewis, historian and author of Horry County, South Carolina 1730-1993*

The HCHS regrets an interrupted publication schedule. This issue of *The IRQ* continues an accelerated schedule to correct the lapse.



Map of the Little River Area



The *Prince* lying at the dock of Little River ca. 1915 bringing supplies from Wilmington

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HCHS Designer Showhouse 2006



The Horry County Historical Society is staging the county's first-ever Designer Showhouse to raise funds for the Society and renovate its historic headquarters, the Rebecca Randall Bryan House, located at 606 Main Street in Conway, S.C. This charming southern home, ca. 1912, is receiving an "extreme make-over" and will be open to the public April 8 – 23 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily; admission is \$15. Approximately 20 interior and landscape designers will renovate the entire property.

— *Notes* —

