

# ISLE OF HOPE

## 1736-1986

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One West Bluff Drive  
Savannah, Georgia

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BLUFF DRIVE

CREDIT: GEORGIA HISTORICAL

The Isle of Hope is a unique and delightful place. From the days of its first three families whose plantations were connected by only an oyster shell path along the river, until today when hundreds of homes share the island, it remains a very special place. There are families who have lived here for many generations; and there are many children who grew up here and then returned with their own families after living elsewhere.

There are too many stories of this island to put in one little booklet but we want to record at least a partial history on this occasion, the two-hundred and fiftieth birthday.

People frequently ask how the Island received its interesting name. Some have said that it was a refuge for Royalists from the French Reign of Terror; some have said it was a refuge from the yellow fever epidemics; and there have been many romantic tales woven around these two theories. Mrs. Cliff Sewell, in her excellent 1974 article, "Isle of Hope, A Garden of Eden," even wrote that the French immigrants called this place "Lisle D'esperance." Though this lovely place was literally a haven from the terror of the French Revolution, it had long before been known as Isle of Hope. Mrs. Sewell also had an intriguing story about gold and hope. It seems that DeSoto hoped he would find gold on the Island when he visited it 400 years ago. <sup>1</sup> Then there were other legends about buried pirates' gold, but to this day, no one has found it. It is also interesting that the original Crown grant for this part of Isle of Hope contained a reservation to the Crown of "One Tenth part of Mines of Silver and Gold only."

Dr. E. Merton Coulter, long-time Editor of the *Georgia Historical Quarterly* and the author of the definitive book, *Wormsloe*, thought that Noble Jones suggested the name because he came from Surrey in old England, not far from the Thames River as it wound its way from London to the sea. There is a place on the Thames called Stanford le Hope which is situated on that river very much like the old Isle of Hope community was situated on the Skidaway River. The name Stanford le Hope had been given to that place by sailors because they found it a safe haven after having passed the dangers of the Goodwin Sands around the mouth of the Thames. Until the settlement of Isle of Hope in 1736, the Island had no name. The Indians had not troubled to name it since they only used it to get over to Skidaway Island, which they did name.

The earliest reference in the records relating to Isle of Hope is in the Journal of William Stephens, Secretary of the Colony. In 1740 he refers to Isle of Hope as the place where Mr. Fallowfield lives. <sup>2</sup> Later, the Island was referred to in a pamphlet, *A True and Historical Narrative of the Colony of Georgia in America*, as follows: "Near the mouth of the Vernon River, upon a kind of Island (which is called Hope Isle)." This pamphlet, a criticism of General Oglethorpe and the Trustees, was written by Dr. Patrick Tailfer, Hugh Anderson, David Douglas, and others and published in Charleston in 1742, Fallowfield was one of this group. They were banished from the Colony of



Georgia for being extreme dissidents. They had been agitating to force the Trustees to rescind the established policy prohibiting the importation of rum and slaves, and the denial of fee simple titles to the land.

According to a 1741 letter from Thomas Causton (formerly a Bailiff and Savannah store-keeper) to the Trustees, <sup>3</sup> by 1736 all of the high ground on the Island had been granted to three men of prominence: Noble Jones received the 500 acres in the South — that is Wormsloe which survives more or less today, though most of it is now owned by the State. John Fallowfield was granted the 500 acres in the middle, and the remaining 500 acres in the North end went to Henry Parker, who was then 2nd Bailiff.

You all know of the important part played by Noble Jones in the early days of the Colony. According to Dr. Coulter, Wormsloe was a busy plantation and its name was derived from the silk worm; evidently Jones was one of those who had a part in the silk industry. He was also interested in horticulture; his son, Dr. Noble Wimberly Jones, continued this interest. In 1772 Benjamin Franklin, who was then "Agent" of the Colony of Georgia in London, sent Dr. Jones some seeds of the Chinese Tallow Tree and ". . . a small Quantity of Upland Rice from Cochin China. It grows on dry Ground, not requiring to be overflow'd like common Rice." <sup>4</sup> No doubt Dr. Jones had discussed the problem of flooding rice crops at Wormsloe with fresh water, since the Island is entirely surrounded by salt water. Alas, today there is no rice grown here of any kind. But the Tallow Tree, which is locally known as the Popcorn Tree, is wide-spread on the Island and also on the mainland.

According to Malcolm Bell, III who did extensive research on Franklin's letter forwarding these horticultural samples, Franklin valued the Tallow Tree as he did the Upland Rice, for its utility: "T is a most useful Plant," he wrote Dr. Jones. He anticipated that the wax enclosing the seeds would be gleaned by the industrious settlers and molded into candles. But not enough industrious citizens could be found because apparently no candles were ever made from the wax. But the fruit, which resembles popcorn when it ripens, is a delight of the birds; the Pileated Woodpecker gorges himself on the waxy fruit in early Winter.

Noble Jones' most important duty at Isle of Hope in the early days of the colony was guarding the narrows on the inland waterway, which brushed his plantation on the East. At the narrows he built a fort and Oglethorpe garrisoned it with a small force. The threat of Spanish invasion was ever-present until their actual invasion took place in 1742; at that time they were repulsed at the Battle of Bloody Marsh on St. Simon's Island. This defeat essentially ended Spain's claim to Georgia and removed any further threat to the British Colonies in North America. Thereafter Jones' fort was neglected until the Civil War.

Henry Parker started out modestly in the Colony. Like Jones, he arrived in the Colony in 1733; Jones was appointed Surveyor and Parker was made an assistant Bailiff. As time went on, Parker became Bailiff, then Secretary



and, when the Trustee's Charter expired, he was appointed Acting Governor until the arrival of Reynolds, the first Royal Governor. Unfortunately, Parker died before Reynolds arrived in 1754.

The Parker home is believed to have been located on the site of the old Hardee house. An old tabby foundation from a much older structure can be seen in the basement, and old maps show the site to be about there.

Parker must have been a generous man, since he is known to have provided a home for two orphaned boys: Peter Tondee and his brother Charles. Their father, a carpenter, had died barely two months after their arrival in the Colony. Peter lived with the Parker family for four years, until age 16. He was a friend of Noble Wimberly Jones, who lived at Wormsloe, and together the boys went swimming and crabbing. Much later in life, after working for years as a carpenter, Peter Tondee was to become the proprietor of Tondee's Tavern, "the center stage of the unfolding drama of the Revolution," as Carl Weeks so vividly describes it in his excellent article, "CARPENTER TONDEE: framer of Savannah's part in American Revolution."<sup>5</sup> Exactly one year before the signing of the Declaration of Independence, on July 4, 1775, Georgia's Second Provincial Congress convened at Tondee's Tavern and Tondee himself was a delegate. The following August, when a copy of the Declaration of Independence reached Savannah and was read from the porch of Tondee's Tavern, Tondee was not among the jubilant crowds; he had become ill and died the previous October.

Parker's widow, Anne, and his descendants continued to own his property until the 19th century. Dr. William Parker, grandson of Henry Parker, was distinguished for being the principle organizer of the Georgia Medical Society in 1812. His estate was settled in 1847 and a plat shows the ownership of most of the Bluff Lots at that time. Part of the North end of the Island is known as Parkersburg, in honor of the founding settler, Henry Parker.

John Fallowfield, who received the center 500 acres, was apparently well-to-do when he came to Georgia in 1734. He paid his own way and was described as a Naval Officer; he too became an assistant Bailiff. However, he allied himself with the dissidents in 1739-40 when that group fought to have the Trustees change the rules of their Charter. Their attacks were leveled primarily against General Oglethorpe who was the resident agent of the Trustees and a Trustee himself. Fallowfield forfeited his land after being banished and records show that his tract was later granted to Noble Jones by Crown Grant. This took place after the Trustees' charter expired and the Colony became a Crown Colony.

Judging by some of the entries in Candler's *Colonial Records of Georgia*, Fallowfield's place during his occupancy was an important stopping place for boats and vessels going to and from Savannah to the outposts of the South.

An old map, dated 1780, shows a ferry about where the marina is located today. It is designated "Parker's Ferry" and on the opposite side of the river there is shown a causeway leading toward Skidaway Island across the marsh.

Much later, probably in the mid-19th century, a bridge was built over the narrows from Wormsloe. This bridge was destroyed in the disastrous 1893 hurricane. There are reports of a tavern in the vicinity of the Ferry. It is probably true because the small settlement at Isle of Hope played an important role in early Colonial Georgia.

The map on which "Parker's Ferry," appears was prepared under direction of Colonel Archibald Campbell, commanding British occupying forces in Savannah, following the defeat of the French and Americans at the Siege of Savannah in October 1779. The causeway probably provided the main access to Skidaway Island in those times. It is somewhat puzzling that no trace of it can be found today, until one makes a close inspection of the site with the map. It then becomes clear that the site of the causeway is now in the Skidaway River. The marsh has shifted Northward and washed away on the South, where the causeway was located.

After General Oglethorpe's brilliant repulse of the Spanish at the Battle of Bloody Marsh in 1742, he left Georgia and returned to England, never again to see America. After his departure, the restrictions against rum and slaves were not revoked, but they were not strictly enforced. Once Georgia became a Crown Colony, the restrictions were lifted entirely and Henry Parker became the first slave-holder on the Island. By mid-18th century, slavery was prevalent throughout Georgia, including Isle of Hope, as it was in all other of the Colonies.

No reference has been found to any military action taking place on the Isle of Hope during the Revolutionary War. There was at that time only a small causeway connecting the Island with the mainland. This approach was probably too exposed for consideration as a landing site for the French forces under Admiral d'Estaing in 1779. Beaulieu was therefore chosen as the landing site; it was much more practical because it is on the mainland and the Vernon River leads directly off Ossabaw Sound. Apparently Isle of Hope had no part in the Siege of Savannah.

The original site of the Isle of Hope Methodist Church on the bend of Parkersburg Road at Holcomb St. was a gift of Dr. Stephen Dupon' by deed dated June 29, 1859. The simple white frame structure, similar in style to that of Midway and Ebenezer Churches, was built with contributions of island residents as well as Savannah citizens.

The Methodist Church was the only church on the island for many years, so it welcomed friends of many faiths from the beginning. The key, about five inches long, hung outside the door to invite all who wished to enter.

A very few years after being built, the sanctuary served as a hospital for Confederate soldiers and the ones who died are buried in the churchyard. Later when Sherman occupied Savannah, some of his men camped there and took the bell from the belfry and melted it for cannonballs. The bell was later replaced by George Wylly.





ISLE OF HOPE METHODIST CHURCH IN 1913.

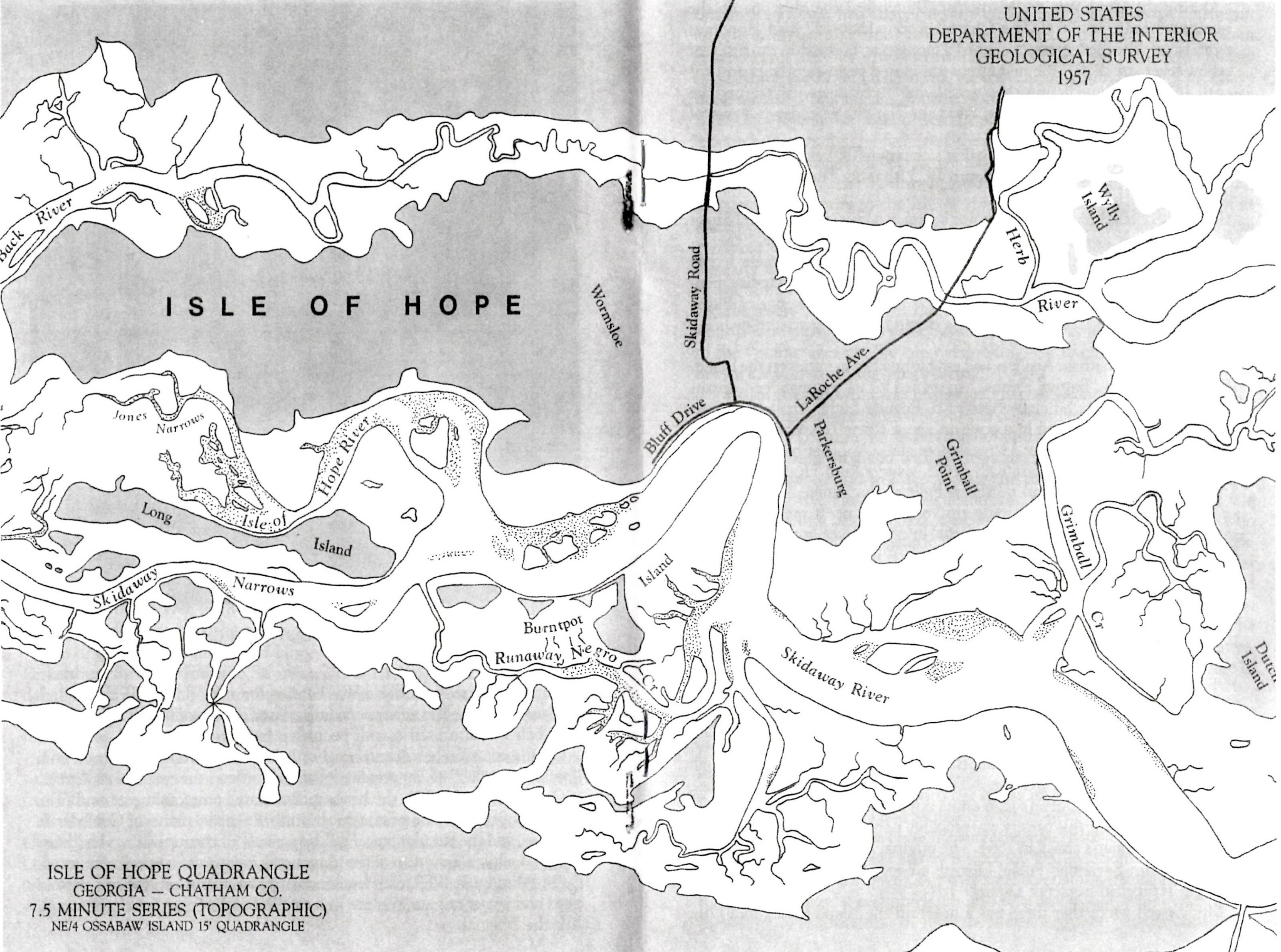
Through the years of World War I and again in World War II, the church bell was rung each day at noon, calling everyone to a moment of silent prayer. The bell was also used to call people to fight fires.

On the occasion of its centennial in 1959, the sanctuary was moved from "beside the road" to its present location between the graceful oak trees.

On February 22, 1984, the historic Sanctuary burned to the ground. The old straight-backed pine pews, some bearing the carved names of Confederate patients, and the circular prayer rail along with all the furnishings had been removed while renovation of the church was in progress, so they were saved.

On February 3, 1985, the new sanctuary had its first service and the old pews and prayer rail are in place in a simple building that looks very much like the original.





ISLE OF HOPE

ISLE OF HOPE QUADRANGLE  
GEORGIA - CHATHAM CO.  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)  
NE/4 OSSABAW ISLAND 15' QUADRANGLE



During the Civil War the Methodist Church was the only one on the island; however, in 1874, The Chapel of Our Lady of Good Hope was established. Two Benedictines opened a monastery, but within the first year yellow fever struck and the monastery was closed permanently. From 1877 until 1888, the Benedictines who were living on Skidaway Island used the Isle of Hope Chapel for Mass on Sundays. The chapel today is a part of St. James Parish.

As early as 1872, island Episcopalians occasionally held services in the Methodist Church, but it was not until 1923, that St. Thomas' Chapel was built.

The Isle of Hope Baptist Church was begun as a mission of the Bull Street Baptist Church in 1952, and they built their first sanctuary in 1954.

The War Between the States brought high hopes and excitement to Isle of Hope. Camp Claghorn, with a garrison of one hundred twenty-five men, was positioned on the section of the island bounded by Avenue of Pines, Noble Glen and the Skidaway River. It is said the men practiced by firing at Burntspot Island.

By 1864, the Chatham Artillery had established two batteries on the Island. The main battery, "Battery Daniell," so named for its commander, Captain Charles Daniell, was officially Battery B, Regular Light Artillery, C.S.A. This battery was emplaced in a position about where the Marina is today, and it was composed of several large calibre guns. Another battery, Taylor's Battery, was located on Grimbal's Point, overlooking Herb River. The LaRoche Avenue bridge had not been built at that time.

There was an earthworks of some kind on the point. It was probably an outpost for Battery Daniell, to give notice in case Yankee boats approached from the North, from the Wilmington River. When the city fell, the men and guns were withdrawn across the Savannah River into South Carolina, along with the rest of General Hardee's troops. No shot had been fired in anger on Isle of Hope, but once the City was occupied, Union troops came to the Island and everyone has heard of their depredations.

We are fortunate to have two maps which give a good idea about the location of Confederate fortifications on the Isle of Hope during the War Between the States. One is a sketch map which was sent by Captain J.A.P. DuPon', C.S.A., commanding the McIntosh Rifles, to his wife to assure her of his safety. This map probably portrays the dispositions about 1862, because he died before June 1863. The other is a detailed map prepared by General Sherman's Engineer, Colonel Poe. <sup>6</sup> There is much similarity of detail between the two maps. DuPon's map omits any reference to Battery Daniell, which indicates that this battery was probably not emplaced until there was a threat of Sherman's attack in 1864. The original DuPon' (his spelling) map is in the Main Savannah Public Library; a copy of the Poe map is in the Georgia Historical Society's Library.

Mrs. Sewell wrote that there was a hotel on the island in the mid-19th

century; but that it had disappeared by 1860. By then Isle of Hope had begun to be considered something of a resort, and was considered healthier than some parts of the City. Also by this time, the architecture of the bluff houses had become pretty well developed. Most of the remaining early houses have been modified beyond recognition of the original style. The house at 61 Bluff Drive is a classic example of the original bluff house. It was built over a period of years for the father of the Wylly brothers, and was completed in 1854. The Solana's home, further down the bluff, is another good example.

By March, 1870, the Savannah, Skidaway and Seaboard Railroad was running excursions daily to the Isle of Hope. The steam trains left a depot at Anderson and Whitaker Streets, and headed for Isle of Hope. From here it backed to Sandfly Station, and then headed for Montgomery, stopping regularly at Cedar Hammock, Bethesda, Burnside and Beaulieu.

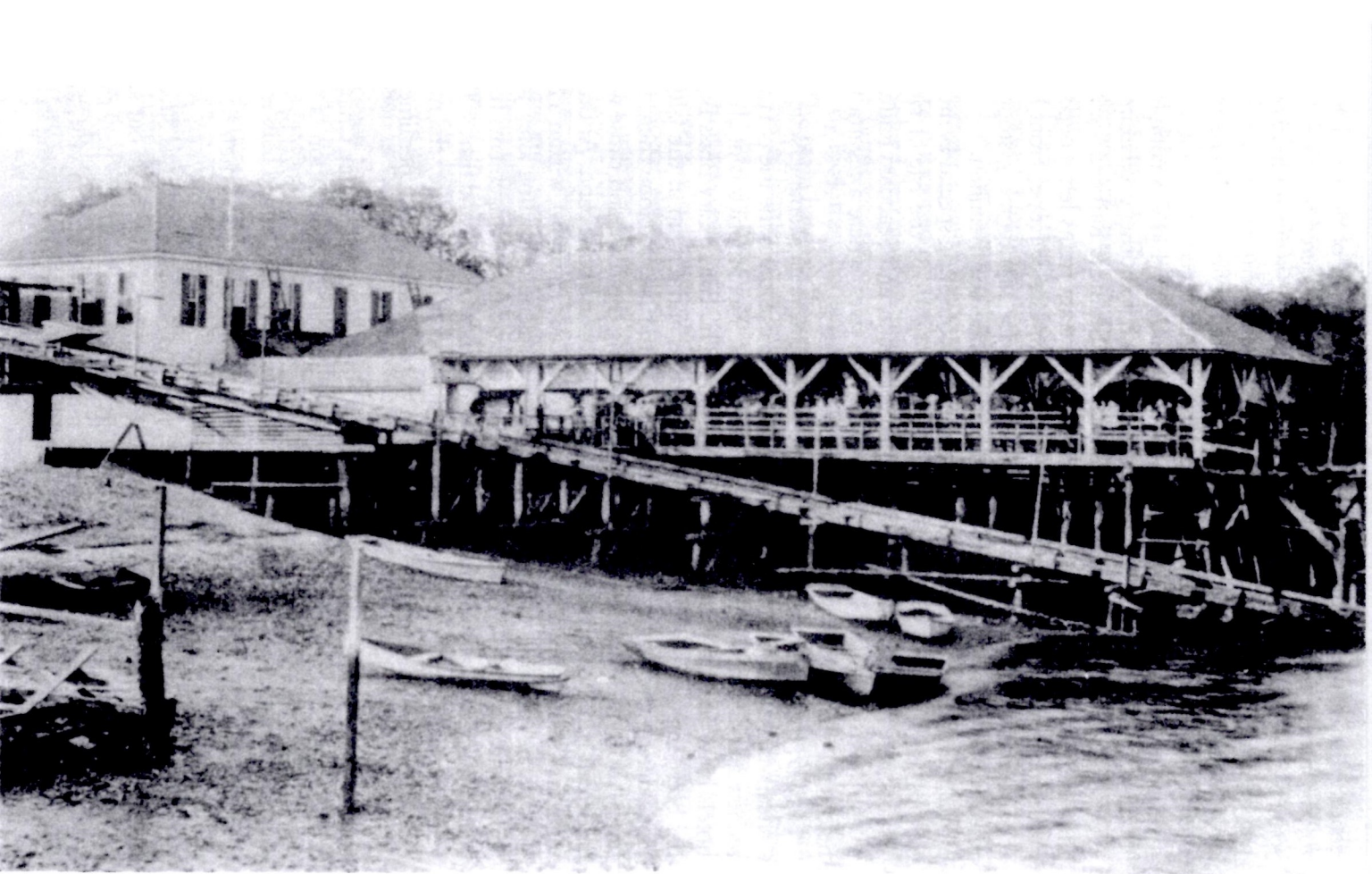
The railroad company promoted business by sponsoring special events at various resort locations. On the Fourth of July in 1873, the Isle of Hope visitors were transported by the Savannah, Skidaway and Seaboard Railroad to the "picnic area on the isle overlooking the river, where a regatta was held with eleven sailing boats racing." <sup>7</sup>

In 1875, the following article appeared in the *Savannah Morning News*. . . "There will be inaugurated today. . . a grand fine excursion to the Isle of Hope, tendered as a compliment to Savannah's visitors. The proprietors of all the hotels have been provided with invitations. . . The Forest City Brass Band has been engaged and will accompany the train and remain at the Isle of Hope during the stay of the excursionists. At the Isle of Hope there is a fine platform in a beautiful shady grove bordering the river, and those who desire can trip the light fantastic to the music of a fine brass band. At Buckingham's Castle (apparently a forerunner to Barbee's Pavilion), within a few yards of the terminus of the railroad there is a splendid bowling alley, and above is an excellent hall with commodious verandah. Arrangements have been perfected for a bountiful lunch. Including crab, oysters, and fish. . . The visitors have placed at their disposals boats and fishing tackle, crabnets, etc. . . The surroundings are delightful the woods redolent with perfume of the fragrant jasmine. . ."

One of the regular riders on the Isle of Hope train was Major Charles S.H. Hardee. The Hardee house is the one built on the foundation of the Henry Parker home, though it was remodeled extensively in 1920 by the Pierponts and named "Fair Oaks."

The Hardee family moved into the house in 1874 and it was their home for forty-six years. They had rented the house next door the previous year. Major Hardy wrote in his book, *Reminiscences and Recollections of Old Savannah*, that he had been advised by his doctor, Dr. J.M. Schley, to go out and live "on the Salts" for a year, but they were so enamored with life here that they stayed. He relates that friends and relatives would come to visit, and they stayed. He wrote that in 1880 there were eighteen people living in his





BARBEE'S PAVILION

CREDIT: GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

house, and he named them all. He wrote, "The house, likewise our hearts, was big enough for them all."

In 1890, the steam train was taken off and an electric trolley car was run to Isle of Hope. A 1968 Savannah newspaper article reported that the line got its electricity from the C & S (not the bank!). The C & S was the City and Suburban Railway.

When electricity was substituted for steam, Mr. Alexander M. Barbee became the conductor of the Isle of Hope Line. He was one of the best known conductors in the history of the street car in Savannah; he had driven the horse car on the Thunderbolt route before he began working on the Isle of Hope Line. He was a conductor to Isle of Hope for twenty years, retiring in 1910. Meanwhile, Barbee's Pavilion, the site of the present marina, became a landmark. The street car line ended across the street from the Pavilion and crowds flocked to his restaurant, they danced, rented his boats, and their children were amused by his Terrapin Farm which he had established in 1904.

Barbee's son, William M. Barbee, in 1918, brought his bride, Rose, to live upstairs over the Pavilion and they worked there too. During the depression, Marathon Dances were held there, and William Barbee brought well-known prizefighters such as Jack Dempsey to perform at the Pavilion.

Much later, after the street cars had been replaced by buses, William Barbee bought the site of the present swimming pool and playground and deeded it to the Isle of Hope Community Club for use as a park and recreational area. An ideal location, in the middle of the island, Barbee's Playground is enjoyed every day by island children. The park is named in honor of Ebbie Paxton, the only young man in the community who lost his life in the Second World War. William Barbee's generosity in 1947 continues to benefit the Isle of Hope.

In the years 1908, 1910 and 1911 the Savannah Motor Club sponsored *The Great Savannah Races*, so named by Dr. Julian K. Quattlebaum in his book of that name. These were international events and attracted entries from major car builders in Europe and America. The Grand Prize Race in 1908 was on Thanksgiving Day, and the Isle of Hope was a part of its scenic 25.13 mile course. The 8-mile marker on Bluff Drive is a present day reminder. Camps for the various racing teams were built along the route and both the Renault and Itala teams were located on the island. Ferguson Avenue was made especially for this race and the sharp curve from Ferguson onto Skidaway Road toward Isle of Hope was an exciting point. For several days before the race, the course was roped off for five hours each day to give the drivers time to practice. In his diary of 1908, a rural letter carrier, William F. Hale, made several notes about the activities concerning the race. On November 16, he wrote, "I carried the mail as usual but had to be more careful than usual as this was the first day of the practice preparatory to the Auto Race on Thanksgiving Day. I got along alright though the cars passed me at the



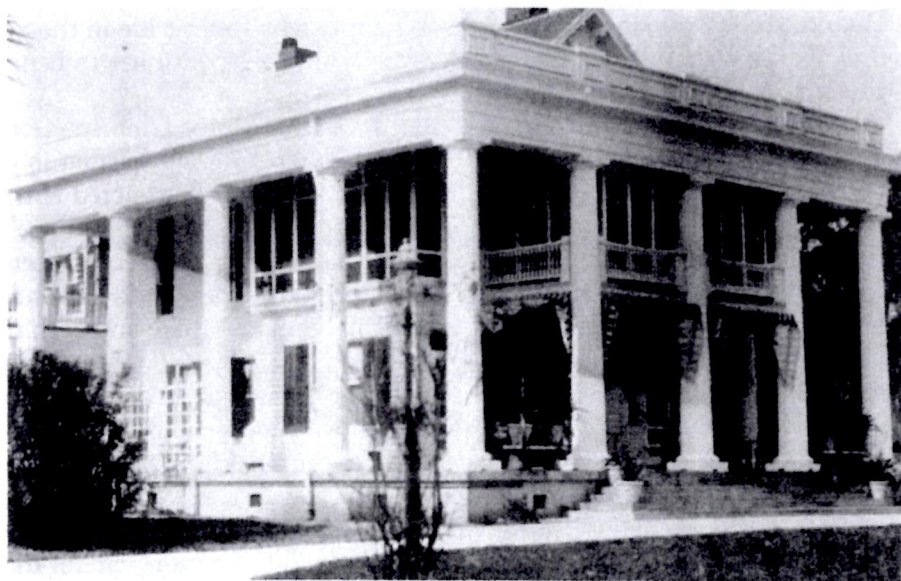
rate of 70 miles an hour and sometimes faster." Another day he wrote, "I had some difficulty in delivering the mail at Isle of Hope as the National Guard prevented my crossing the road at one point but took the mail across for me." On Thanksgiving Day he lamented, "The cars ran no faster than they did during the practice season!"

The area known as "Wymberley" was originally settled by John Fallowfield, then, in 1763, after Fallowfield's departure from the colony, it was granted by the Crown to Noble Jones. In the generations that followed, "Wymberley" was divided through bequests and grants. There were at least six families who owned various parcels of land, including the Glen's.

In 1888, Col. John H. Estill, owner and publisher of the *Savannah Morning News*, bought the land from all the heirs and combined it into one estate. He built a grand mansion on the river and used the former home of Noble Glen as his gatekeeper's cottage.

In 1909, the estate was bought by Judge George W. Tiedeman and named "Carsten Hall." The Tiedemans landscaped extensively with pear and pecan orchards and cedar and palm trees. There were tennis courts, stables, an indoor bowling alley, and a large boat house. The manor house burned in 1933 and was never rebuilt. The Tiedemans moved into the cottage and lived there for several years. The cottage remains today; said to have been built in 1820, it is the oldest house on the island.

Mr. William B. Flinn used the "Carsten Hall" location for docking and milling of his timber operation on Skidaway Island in the early 1940's. In 1946, Mr. James S. Richmond purchased "Carsten Hall" from Mr. Flinn and developed it into the "Wymberley" of today.



CARSTEN HALL  
DESTROYED IN 1933 FIRE.





Many long-time residents remember the old Isle of Hope School. Several members of the 1923 student body still live here. Look at the class picture below and see if you can find any of your neighbors!



Long time residents remember sailboat races in the 1930's held by The Savannah Yacht Club. Their quarters at Thunderbolt had burned long before so the races were held from private docks at Isle of Hope.

During World War II many boat owners who were not in one of the services were pressed into service with the Coast Guard Auxiliary and many of the ladies served in the Aircraft Warning System.

After the war more and more people came to live here in the new subdivisions and the electric streetcars were replaced by buses. The churches all grew and new buildings went up.

Traditions such as oyster roasts, outdoor weddings, and garden tours have continued through the years. Though some of the old landmarks are gone, there is a feeling of continuity and serenity found in few other spots. Tour buses drive by everyday full of people who marvel at the beauty all around us.

- 1 *Savannah News-Press*, Sunday, November 10, 1974. Magazine Section, p. F-1.
- 2 *Colonial Records of Georgia*, Candler, Vol. IV, p. 559, 568, 619; Vol. XXIII, p. 175.
- 3 *General Oglethorpe's Georgia*, Beehive Press, Vol. II, p. 559.
- 4 *Wormsloe*, by E. Merton Coulter, p. 29. And *Some Notes and Reflections upon a letter from Benjamin Franklin to Noble Wymberly Jones, October 7, 1772*, by Malcolm Bell, III, Ashantilly Press, Darien, 1966. p. 6, 7, and 8.
- 5 *Inside Savannah*, July 1985, p. 23.
- 6 *MAP illustrating the defense of SAVANNAH, Ga. and the operations resulting in its Capture by the army commanded by Maj. Gen. W.T. Sherman*, compiled 1880-1881 under the direction of Bvt. Brig. Gen. O.M. Poe, Maj. Corps of Engrs., Col. A.D.C., late Chief Engr. Military Division of Mississippi.
- 7 *The Savannah Electric & Power Co. (1866-1971)*, by Henry Eason.