

# **The Founding of Beaufort**

## **And**

# **The History of The Cuthbert House Inn**

### *From the first European explorers to the Revolutionary War*

Native Indians lived in coastal Beaufort as early as 4000 BC. Prior to the founding of Beaufort, the Spanish, French and English explored this coast. Written history began in 1514 when Spanish explorer Pedro de Salaza landed here, the second European landing on North America just a year after Ponce de Leon landed at St. Augustine. Other Spanish voyages occurred in 1521, 1525 and 1526 that led to the lost Spanish city of San Miguel de Gualdape. In 1525, Spanish captain Pedro de Quexos named this region “Santa Elena”, one of the oldest European place names in North America.

In 1526, French captain Jean Ribault arrived and renamed the sound “Port Royal”, the deepest natural harbor south of New York. On what is now Parris Island to the south, Ribault established the first protestant colony in the New World, calling it Charlesfort. It was abandoned in 1563.

In 1566, the Spanish returned, led by Pedro Menendez de Aviles, who established “la ciudad de Santa Elena” at the Charlesfort site and created the first official capital of Florida. The capital was moved to St. Augustine in 1574. Santa Elena was the northern bastion of Spanish Florida until it was abandoned in 1587.

English captain William Hilton arrived from Barbados in 1663. Then in 1666, Colonel Robert Sanford arrived with Dr. Henry Woodward, who became the first permanent English settler in South Carolina after Colonel Sanford left.

In 1685, Scottish settlers led by Lord Cardross established Stuart town, upriver from Charlesfort. It was destroyed by a Spanish army in 1686. By 1698, the first English land grants were given to Scottish Indian traders John Stewart and Thomas Nairne. Rivalry with Spanish Florida continued for the next 67 years.

Rivalry with Spanish Florida resulted in the founding of Beaufort. Queen Ann’s war (1702 – 1713) prompted an attack by Carolinians on St. Augustine in 1702 led by Colonel James Moore’s army assembled at Port Royal Island. The attack on St. Augustine failed, but on their return, they left an outpost here, in today’s Beaufort. By 1706, the Beaufort outpost had become a log block house and palisade with a garrison of British redcoats. The town grew around the fort, with Indian trade in deerskins as the first commerce.

In 1709, the traders petitioned the Lords proprietors of Carolina to establish a town. On January 17, 1711, the charter for the town of Beaufort, then only the second oldest town in South Carolina, was issued. It was named for Henry Somerset, duke of Beaufort, one of the Lords proprietors. In 1711, Beaufort's streets were laid out and named. Town lots were granted at that time.

Two of the town's founders and first settlers were Captain Thomas Nairne and Colonel John "Tuscarora Jack" Barnwell.

This early settlement was destroyed by the Yamassee Indians on April 15, 1715. The Yamassee war followed (1715 – 1728) and depopulated the frontier, driving the Yamassee to Florida where they merged with the Seminoles. Thomas Nairne was killed in the first massacre. Colonel "Tuscarora Jack" Barnwell was one of the heroes of the war, which ended the Indian trade and Indian habitation of the low country.

The plantation era followed the retreat of the Yamassee. Cattle thrived on the Sea Islands and on the mainland where an open range prompted branding of cattle and the development of "cowpens" in the pine forests.

The decade before the revolutionary war were a very prosperous time, with cattle, rice, indigo (a tropical plant of the pea family, which was at that time widely cultivated as a source of dark blue dye) and a thriving local shipbuilding industry, utilizing the abundant live-oak timber.

Political strife with Great-Britain prompted royal governor Charles Montague to move the capital from Charleston to Beaufort on October 8, 1772, but his attempt to bully the king failed. The capital was moved back to Charleston after two days, prompting Thomas Heyward Jr. to enter politics at the Beaufort Assembly. He later signed the Declaration of Independence for South Carolina, and moving the Beaufort Assembly is listed as a grievance in the Declaration of Independence.

Beaufort was divided by the revolutionary war. Friends, neighbors and relatives fought each other as Tories and Patriots. British invasions in 1779 and 1780 halted commerce, destroyed properties and kidnaped thousands of slaves. British general Augustine Prevost's troops burned Price Williams Parish church in Sheldon in 1779. Colonel Banastre Tarleton's troops stole all the horses on Port Royal Island. When the Treaty of Paris recognized American independence in 1783, Beaufort had to rebuild after eight years of war.

Indigo disappeared. Rice was depressed for decades. Beaufort's recovery was prompted by the introduction of long staple, Sea Island cotton (*Gossypium barbadense*),

also known as extra-long staple cotton. It is a species of cotton plant that has been cultivated to have extra-long staple fibers associated with high quality products, and whose growth requires full sun and high humidity and rainfall. The seed came from loyalist planters in the Bahamas. South Carolina's first commercial crop of Sea Island cotton was grown by William Elliott at Myrtle Bank plantation on Hilton Head Island. It was the beginning of the cotton revolution in the old south.

### The arrival of the Cuthbert family in the Carolinas

The roots of the **Cuthbert** family go back to the heart of the Scottish country: Inverness, Scotland. The **Cuthbert** family has a long, distinguished history, dating back at least to 1411 when King James II of Scotland bestowed upon George Cuthbert of Castlehill for his military service to the Crown, a heraldic Coat of Arms (See pictures here below):



Several generations later, in 1592, King James VI of Scotland granted John **Cuthbert** a charter unifying the family lands near Inverness into a free Barony. Thereafter, John bore the title of Baron of Castlehill, and following the traditional inheritance rule of *primo geniture*, his title and estate were passed on to the eldest son of each succeeding generation.

As was often the case under this system of inheritance, younger sons had to find other occupations, such as the military or the clergy, and many moved to overseas British Colonies where opportunity beckoned. This appears to have been the case with James, the youngest of the then-Baron's four sons. Having decided to seek his fortune in the Carolina's, James **Cuthbert** landed in Charleston on October 20, 1737.

### The successful implantation of the Cuthbert's American branch

With letters of introduction and ambitions to make a success in the new world, James soon found his way to Beaufort where he met and married Mary Hazzard, daughter of an already prominent South Carolina family. James and Mary begat the American branch of the **Cuthbert**'s, and within

a generation, their progeny became part of and intermarried with other of the state's aristocratic planter families, including the Barnwell's, Heyward's and Rhett's.

In the 1740's, indigo was introduced to the Sea Islands. This prompted the importation of tens of thousands of African slaves. Colonial wars with Spanish Florida and years of pirate raids slowed the growth of the town until the British acquired Florida in 1763.

The **Cuthbert**'s prospered and by the early 1800's had amassed considerable wealth in the form of land and slaves. In 1831, Mary B. Stuart, widow of John Alexander Cuthbert, acquired Brays Island from the estate of Thomas Bowman for \$5,000. Although the title remained in her name, Mary gave the property to her son, William Henry **Cuthbert**, to manage as his own. It may be that she wanted to see how competent a planter he was before giving it to him outright.

In addition to Brays Island, Mary owned Rocky Point Plantation (now known as Mackay Point) directly across the Pocotaligo River. Mary's in-town residence was a beautiful house on Bay Street in Beaufort, now known as the **Cuthbert House Inn**. Later, she acquired property in the mountains of North Carolina where the family would go to escape the summer heat, and when the war came, to escape the Yankees. Clearly the twice-widowed Mary was a very capable, strong individual and would have set high standards for her son.

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William Henry Cuthbert	Caroline Porcher Cuthbert
1814 - 1873	1818 -1873

Young William relished the life of a planter and took up residence on Brays Island with his bride, Caroline Porcher, the daughter of a doctor from Charleston. On the island, they raised livestock, crops, and eight boys (no daughters) ! What a lively, happy life it must have been for them here in those halcyon years before the war.

Here below is an agricultural report for the year ending June 1, 1860 that lists the following facts and figures pertaining to Cuthbert's Brays Island plantation:

Acres of Improved Land	700
Acres of Unimproved Land	200
Cash Value of Property	\$9,000
Value of Farming Implements	\$2,000
Horses	2
Asses and Mules	4
Milch (sic) Cows	50
Working Oxen	12
Other Cattle	60
Sheep	40
Swine	20
Value of Live Stock	\$2,000

Crops produced at Brays Island in the year ended June 1, 1860:

Wheat	0
Bushels of Indian Corn	2,000
Bushels of Oats	0
Bushels of Rice	0
Bushels of Ginned Cotton (Bales of 400 lbs. each)	70
Wool (lbs. of)	100
Peas and Beans (bushels of)	300
Irish Potatoes (bushels of)	0
Sweet Potatoes (bushels of)	1,500
Butter (lbs. of)	150

Several observations can be drawn from this list. First, it is evident that William proved himself as an able agriculturalist; he had kept the operation going for 29 years at that point, and his crop production compares favorably with other planters in the vicinity. Second, there was no rice being grown at Brays Island Plantation in 1860. Rice had been introduced from West Africa in the 1730s and large plantations had developed among the freshwater swamps and tidal creeks. By the mid-1800s, the "inland method" of rice cultivation (which may have been practiced in Beaufort at an earlier date) had been abandoned in favor of large scale production along fresh water rivers, such as the Combahee. Instead, cotton, corn and possibly sweet potatoes appear to have been the principal cash crops being grown on Brays at that time. In terms of livestock, the number of beef cattle and dairy cows suggest that these may have been raised for commercial purposes. It would appear that most of the other agricultural outputs were used to sustain the plantation's inhabitants.

A hint as to William's farming methods is seen in the small number of working stock: only two horses, four mules, and 12 oxen. Instead, as was the practice in Beaufort in those days, all the cultivation and harvesting was done by slaves. A Federal schedule compiled in October, 1860 shows that William **Cuthbert** had 70 slaves on Brays Island. According to this census, they ranged in age from infants to 60 years of age, and 61 percent of them were male. William's mother, Mary,

had 88 slaves at Rocky Point Plantation across the river, and this combined labor force was ferried back and forth as labor was needed to conduct the farming operations of the two properties. A few of the headstones in the cemeteries on Brays Island show dates of birth that preceded emancipation, so one may surmise that those individuals were born as Cuthbert slaves.

The antebellum era was known as the “periclean age” of Beaufort (relating to **Pericles** or to the period when Athens was the intellectual and artistic leader of the Greek city-states.) Great wealth from Sea Islands cotton and “Carolina Gold” rice made Beaufort one of the wealthiest towns in America. Large summer villas were built along Bay Street and throughout the old town. Beaufort College was chartered in 1795, the Beaufort Library Society was founded in 1803, and a female seminary was added in the 1850s. On December 17, 1803, the town of Beaufort was incorporated. The first municipal government was an intendant and 6 wardens. Beaufort produced political and intellectual leaders of the Old South, including Senator Robert W. Barnwell, poet William J. Grayson, and writer William Elliot, III.

The **Cuthbert House Inn** is a lovely example of an antebellum house. Built around 1810 by the wealthy plantation owner, **John Alexander Cuthbert II**, it was designed to receive the family’s guests during the summer social season and, as such, lends itself perfectly to its current function of bed and breakfast. The inn enjoys spectacular waterfront views, with sunset being a favorite time for many guests.

In 1819, Beaufort was connected to the outside world by regular steamboat packets between Charleston and Savannah. President James Monroe visited in 1819, and the Marquis de Lafayette was entertained here in 1825. The wealth of antebellum Beaufort was based on the value and labor of slaves. In 1850, the Sea Islands had 1,111 white people and 8,361 slaves occupying 151 plantations.

Before the Civil War, Beaufort’s planters were leading defenders of slavery and southern rights. A Beaufort native, Senator Robert Barnwell Rhett became South Carolina’s Father of Secession. This region led the state into secession, and South Carolina led the South out of the Union. Beaufort was the town where South Carolina’s Ordinance of Secession was drawn up. The Civil War ensued.

### *The Civil War Era and the Battle of Port Royal*

The Sea Islands of South Carolina were now home to some of the wealthiest and most exclusive planters in the South. Beaufort, the only sizable town in the region, was the locus of some of South Carolina’s most ardent secessionists. The large mansions dotting the islands were the homes of the likes of Robert Barnwell Rhett, the fiercest of the Southern secessionists, and William J. Grayson, secessionist poet and champion of slavery.

Beaufort had a year-round white population of about 2,000. The number was nearly double that in the summer, when the wealthy planters left the cities for the finer weather of the islands. About 13,000 black slaves also permanently resided on the Sea Islands. Representing 83 percent of the population, the slaves ran the plantations, oversaw the cotton fields and tended the rice for

which the area was famous. They lived, worked and suffered under repressive slave laws, completely isolated from the mainland.

The Civil War and the emancipation of slaves brought an end to the plantation economy and to the genteel way of life that it supported. After Federal troops captured the Confederate forts on Hilton Head in November 1861, the white residents of Beaufort and surrounding areas fled en masse, taking with them only what they could carry on their persons or in their carriages. Mary Stuart left for North Carolina, leaving her lovely Cuthbert House on Bay Street home to be ransacked by masterless slaves, then occupied by Union troops; her daughter-in-law, Caroline, together with those of Caroline's sons too young for military service, went with her.

The Civil War began in Charleston Harbor in April, 1861. Three days after the fall of Fort Sumter in April 1861, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a blockade of all Southern ports. While that decree had an unintended political impact – the tacit recognition of the Confederacy as a belligerent – it was nevertheless an essential action on his part. The European nations had already determined that they would not recognize or honor a Union declaration that the Southern ports were closed to trade. In order to ensure the de facto closing of the ports, the Union had to assert control over the various waterways and coastlines of the Confederacy.

The blockade proposed by Lincoln was part of an overall strategy championed by General-in-Chief Winfield Scott that was derisively given the nickname ‘Anaconda’ by the press and political opponents of the administration. Scott believed that, given the temperament of the Southern people and their deep love for the Union, in time they would realize the error of their ways and return to the fold. His theory required a strategy that did not rest on battles and invasions but on the ability of the Union to slowly strangle the South into submission.

Scott’s plan boiled down to establishing a deep-water blockade of the entire Confederate coast to prevent the South from doing business with European countries. To efficiently administer the blockade, he divided it into four regions: the North and South Atlantic Blockading squadrons, responsible for watching the eastern seaboard, and the East and West Gulf Blockading squadrons, which kept an eye on the Gulf of Mexico. In addition, a 60,000-man army supported by gunboats would be sent down the Mississippi River to New Orleans in order to split the Confederacy in half and cut off the shipment of resources from the west to the east. In the end, he believed, the rebellion would be choked to death by internal and external economic strangulation. Scott’s insightful strategy took advantage of the North’s strengths, including the U.S. Navy, but was ridiculed by many who called for a quick battlefield victory to end the war.

As vessels of various kinds were pressed into service on blockade duty, a new issue presented itself. In order to be in a position to respond to the elusive nature of Southern blockade runners and to be able to interdict ‘illegal’ shipping without regard to the arbitrary nature of winds and tides, the Federal blockading fleets would have to rely on steam power and coal. For a flotilla to remain on station, coaling stations and maintenance facilities would be needed.

Initially, the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron operated out of the ports of Hampton Roads, Va., and Key West, Fla. Those bases, however, were far from the primary Confederate ports of Charleston, S.C., Savannah, Ga., and New Orleans. Blockading ships thus spent as much time getting to their operational stations from the bases as they did on duty. In addition, the coasts of the Carolinas and Georgia were filled with dozens of minor inlets and natural harbors that could

provide safe haven to blockade runners. The Union naval force, therefore, would have to be exceptionally large to watch over the long stretch of coastline, thereby requiring even more extensive base facilities. To have any chance for success, the Union needed a new strategic approach.

Ultimately, the Federal strategy along the Confederate coast was based upon the findings and reports of an ad hoc strategy board convened by Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles and consisting of Captain Samuel Francis Du Pont, superintendent of the U.S. Coast Survey, Major J.G. Garnard of the U.S. Engineers and Commander Charles H. Davis of the U.S. Navy.

Among its many duties, the Blockade Strategy Board was charged with finding suitable coaling stations along the Southern coast. At its first meeting, however, the members determined that such depots might be used for other purposes as well, including storing provisions and serving as refuges or headquarters for the forces along that part of the coast. The board also looked at the development of the depots as support bases for inland military expeditions.

Consequently, Du Pont and his colleagues issued six primary and four supplemental reports detailing the Confederate coast and the significant rivers, harbors and inlets along it. They determined which areas could be blocked and which could be turned into bases for the fleet in order to enhance the Navy's ability to shut off access to ports. The panel described the water, the land, the population and the value of landing points along the Confederacy's coast. Their report formed the basis for future strategic naval actions and amphibious operations against the Confederates.

The first Northern success resulting from the recommendations of the board was the assault and capture of Cape Hatteras, N.C., on April 27, 1861. Seven warships, under the command of Flag Officer Silas H. Stringham, shelled the two forts protecting Hatteras Inlet into submission. Major General Benjamin Butler's 900 soldiers then occupied the works. That action was followed two weeks later by the U.S. Navy's seizure of Ship Island off Biloxi, Miss.

The Union then began planning another attack on the Confederacy's South Atlantic coast. The exact point of attack was not specified during the planning stages, in keeping with the Blockade Board's view that 'the simple putting to sea of such a force, if it were only to return to its port, would cause general alarm, and the Gulf States could no longer permit their troops to swell the armies of Virginia. The force thus organized, after being, by frequent embarkations and disembarkations, used as a means of threat, and thus perfectly drilled to its intended service, might at last be permitted to strike its blow. Whether at New Orleans, or Mobile, or Pensacola, or Savannah, or Port Royal, or that focus of rebellion—the scene of the great indignity offered our flag – Charleston, might be decided at the last moment.'

In the late summer of 1861, Du Pont was given the title of flag officer and placed in command of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron. An impressive and aloof 45-year-old veteran of the Mexican War, Du Pont had previously participated in long, drawn-out blockade actions off the California coast during that conflict and knew from personal experience how difficult they were to manage, coordinate and maintain. He was also well versed in the rigors of independent command.



Du Pont set about organizing an expedition to seize a harbor to use as a base for the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron. The target of the expedition was to be either Bull's Bay, S.C., or Fernandina, Fla. Brigadier General Thomas W. Sherman was ordered to work with Du Pont and organize a 12,000-man infantry force that would take and hold the harbor's points of land once its protecting forts had been reduced by naval gunfire.

At the start of the Civil War, the U.S. Navy stood in the doorway between two maritime eras – that of wood and sail, and that of iron and steam. The threshold was symbolized by Du Pont's flagship, *Wabash*, whose combination of wooden sides, steam engine and 44-gun battery consisting of the most powerful rifled ordnance in history represented both the advantages and the weaknesses facing the Navy. Du Pont understood the need for new tactics. He was skeptical, however, regarding the concepts of ironclads and monitors. The upcoming operation would allow him to test modern naval tactics that took advantage of advanced weaponry and the increased maneuverability provided by steam power.

As indicated in an October letter to Henry Winter Davis, a longtime friend and mentor, Du Pont was concerned about the planning for the expedition. 'I shall have some twenty men-of-war, small and weak some of them, but others very suitable, and if we could have commenced a couple of weeks earlier, I would have had an efficient squadron,' he noted. 'We will make it answer however. To form simple lines of sailing and to establish the proper signals with such a number of transports unused to these things, to avoid separation and collision, to see to the transshipment over the bays, and the landing of such a number of men under fire, in all probability, are matters which occupy me a good deal as you may suppose – but it must go right.'

On October 29, the Du Pont expedition departed from Hampton Roads, Va., with as much secrecy as possible. Not only was the force to conduct the largest joint Army-Navy operation of the war to date, but the flotilla was also the largest ever assembled in the United States. It consisted of 14 warships with 120 guns, 26 collier and supply ships and 25 transports for the 12,000 troops. In addition to the 44-gun flagship *Wabash*, the fleet included the steam sloops *Susquehanna*, *Pawnee* and *Mohican*; steamers *Bienville*, *Seminole*, *Pocahontas* and *Augusta*; and the sloop *Vandalia*. The size of the expedition was such that Bull's Bay and Fernandina were deemed too small. Du Pont's armada instead set a course for Port Royal, S.C., between Charleston and Savannah.

The Blockade Board had quickly recognized the value of Port Royal. The panel's second report, issued on July 13, 1861, described Port Royal Sound as the 'finest harbor south of Chesapeake Bay, which it resembles in capacity and extent. It is approached by three channels, the least of which has seventeen feet of water....Several of our screw frigates of the first class can pass the bar, and when the entrance is once made a whole navy can ride at anchor in the bay in uninterrupted health and security....The entrance is over two miles wide; there is fine anchorage under Bay Point; on the shore there is a number of roughhouses, the summer resort of planters. Water may be had at the Station Port Royal, Land's End....Near this point may be constructed a wharf for a coaling station above the mouth of the little creek....Port Royal is one of the wealthiest of the Sea Islands, and is devoted to the culture of sea-island cotton.'

In the summer of 1861, Confederate Brig. Gen. Roswell S. Ripley, commander of the Department of South Carolina, designated a series of harbor-protection forts along the state's coast. In support, South Carolina Governor Francis Pickens requested cannons from Richmond and

bought powder from Connecticut with state funds. He also requested 1,800 men to staff the defensive positions proposed by Ripley.

By the fall of 1861, two forts built at the urging of General P.G.T. Beauregard had been established to protect Port Royal Sound. Construction engineers Major Francis D. Lee and Captain J.W. Gregory were obliged, however, to arm the batteries of the forts with such guns as the Confederate government could provide, even though more were called for and needed. The result was that the positions included the 20-gun Fort Beauregard, manned by 640 men along with a five-gun outer work on Bay Point that protected the left flank of the sound, while on Hilton Head Island, Fort Walker consisted of 23 guns and a one-gun outwork serviced by 622 soldiers. Just before the arrival of the Union fleet, another 1,000 men, along with two howitzers for Fort Walker, were transferred into the area. Brigadier General Thomas F. Drayton, overall commander of the Port Royal defenses and the brother of Commander Percival Drayton of USS *Pocahontas*, moved his headquarters from Beaufort to Hilton Head on November 6, 1861.

Despite these efforts, the two forts, which were separated by the three-mile-wide mouth of the sound, were not adequate to withstand the might of the U.S. Navy. A fleet could maneuver between the two positions and largely keep out of range of either. To be effective, the forts needed guns of longer range and larger caliber, which were unavailable so early in the war.

In addition to the forts, the sound was protected by a paltry Confederate naval flotilla under the command of Commodore Josiah Tatnall. The fleet was made up of three tugs and a converted river steamer, each of which had two or three guns.

The Union fleet left Hampton Roads on October 29 in a tight, well-disciplined formation. Du Pont was concerned about the hard-to-manage size of the flotilla and the various types of vessels and experience of the commanding officers. Nature conspired against the Union commander, for on November 1 the fleet encountered a hurricane-strength storm off Cape Hatteras that scattered the ships. That same day, Confederate Secretary of War Judah P. Benjamin telegraphed Governor Pickens and General Drayton that an enemy fleet was headed for Port Royal. The point of attack was no longer a secret.

On November 2, Du Pont and Wabash arrived off Port Royal – alone. Now the worth of his detailed planning and preparation, as well as the training and professionalism of his ships' commanders, showed their value. The fleet was largely able to reassemble off the inlet to Port Royal Sound in spite of the severity of the recent storm. By November 4, the flotilla had converged, and during the next few days the vessels prepared for combat and moved over the sound's outer sandbar. At the same time, the coastal survey crew attached to the fleet repaired the marker buoys in the mouth of the sound.

As with all plans, some factors were beyond the control of even the best officers. Despite all the preparations, the army invasion force unwisely had placed all of its ordnance and ammunition aboard one ship, *Ocean Express*. Originally towed by *Baltic* until the gale, this was the one ship that did not rendezvous with the fleet and arrive off Port Royal. The soldiers would have to land with only 100 rounds each and no field guns. While Du Pont could supply small-arms ammunition from the fleet's stocks, he could not provide the shells needed by the army's field guns. The

attack could not be a joint operation as originally envisioned. Gunfire from the ships would have to silence the forts before the troops could land.

Based on a reconnaissance of the forts protecting Port Royal conducted on November 5, Du Pont and his flag captain, C.H. Davis, developed and issued a novel attack plan that involved a double reduction. It was designed to take full advantage of the large expanse of water between the two defending forts, the mobility of steam vessels and the firepower of the vessels themselves, especially the 44-gun Wabash, as well as the continuity of fire provided by such a large fleet. Fort Walker, Du Pont surmised, was the stronger of the Confederate forts, and operations would initially focus on its reduction.

The plan called for two squadrons, or columns, of ships to move into the sound. The main column, made up of the heaviest ships, would move in a line-ahead formation, with Wabash in the van followed by the frigate Susquehanna, the sloops Mohican, Seminole and Pawnee, the gunboats Unadilla, Ottawa and Pembina and the sailing sloop Vandalia, towed by the steamer Isaac Smith, which had lost all of her guns in the storm. The ships would pass the forts, simultaneously firing on both strongholds.

When they were two miles into the sound, they would turn about to the west and south. As the vessels headed back out of the sound along a line taking them closer to Fort Walker, their guns would fire on that strongpoint's weak northern side as well as enfilade its strongest positions facing the water. Already sailing against the incoming tide, Du Pont's ships would slow to a crawl as they passed the fort. At the mouth of the sound they would turn about once more and retrace their previous path past the forts. This pattern would be maintained until the forts were reduced.

The second column of five lighter gunboats—Bienville, Seneca, Curlew, Penguin and Augusta—would range to starboard, protecting the flank of the heavy column from attack by the Confederate naval squadron in the sound. Once past the forts, the light column would peel off and fire into their weaker side walls.

On November 6 the fleet prepared for action, taking down the topgallant masts and readying their armament. General Drayton, who was at Fort Walker, later wrote that 'The morning of 7th of November was a still, clear, beautiful morning, not a ripple on the broad expanse of water to disturb the accuracy of fire from the broad decks of that magnificent armada...advancing in battle array.'

At 9 a.m., general quarters were sounded throughout the Union fleet, and at 9:17 the ships cleared for action and stood into the sound. Ten minutes later the forts opened fire, answered immediately by the bow swivel gun of Wabash, commanded by Lieutenant Roswell Lamson. Once engaged, the ship maintained a terrific and well-directed fire on the forts.

After a show of force, Tatnall's small fleet of weak, makeshift warships was quickly bottled up near the mouth of Skull Creek, behind Hilton Head Island, by the squadron of Federal gunboats. These vessels then concentrated on bringing their guns to bear on the exposed left flank of Fort Walker.

Mounted atop a parapet for better range, Fort Walker's cannons were exposed to enemy fire. In addition, the Confederates had made no provision to place artillery on the bluff overlooking the

fort's flank. With poorly sighted guns, crews that were incompletely trained and powder of an inferior quality, the defenders of Forts Walker and Beauregard were not prepared for a long duel. As the engagement continued, the inexperienced Southern gunners quickly tired.

Taking advantage of steam power, the heavy squadron did not stop, drop anchor and open fire from fixed positions, as wind-powered ships would have. The Navy gunners blasted away at the forts while their ships were moving, creating ranging and targeting problems for the Confederate artillerymen. The Union vessels continually shifted position, pounding both strongholds with almost mechanical precision at a rate of two dozen shells per minute.

The Southerners, at least initially, were able to score some hits. On the first pass of the heavy squadron, fire from Fort Beauregard hit most of the ships, causing casualties among the Union tars. At 10 a.m. the leading Federal ship turned about to the south. At this point, Du Pont's plan broke down. Rather than the entire squadron following the flagship on the outward leg of the elliptical path, only Susquehanna and Bienville followed. As Wabash slowly passed Fort Walker, 800 yards away, Du Pont saw that the rest of the ships were not following. In spite of his signal to 'close the order' and 'close action, follow the commander-in-chief,' the remainder of the heavy squadron stayed inside the sound, providing enfilade fire on the forts, mainly Fort Beauregard. The ship's effective fire dismounted the Confederate guns and scattered the crews, further degrading the ability of the forts to defend themselves.

'On our second attack I can remember nothing in naval history that came to this ship in terrific repetitions of her broadsides,' Du Pont reported. 'The officers of the Army, who with 14,000 men were looking on, were filled with wonder and admiration.' By the end of the second pass, Fort Walker had only three guns still operational. The Southerners' defense was gallant but as the bombardment continued almost unceasingly, the morale of the defenders was broken, and they became increasingly unnerved. As soon as the larger vessels took flanking positions on the forts, the Confederates simply hoped to hold out as long as possible as a matter of honor.

By the start of the third leg of the heavy squadron, Du Pont received a signal from the commander of Ottawa that Fort Walker had been abandoned. Wabash stood within 500 yards of the fort and fired a broadside and both pivot guns into it, verifying that it was unmanned. Shortly after the fall of Fort Walker, Fort Beauregard was also abandoned. After enduring four hours of firing and three turns by the Union column, the Confederates had given up their defense.

By 4 p.m., the fleet secured from battle stations and the crews were sent to supper. More than 500 surfboats were then employed to bring the 12,000-man landing party ashore. Commander John Rogers, Du Pont's aide, rowed to the fort and placed the national colors on the ramparts, after which Marines landed to assume control over the works. The Marines turned the fort over to Army Brig. Gen. Horatio Wright and his brigade for garrisoning, and by sundown on the 7th, both forts were in the hands of U.S. Army and Marine troops.

As the guns cooled, a battle damage assessment revealed that nearly all of the Union ships had sustained some hits, with six sailors killed and 20 wounded. Wabash had been struck from all directions, her mainmast shot through and her spars, rigging and hull hit. Inside the forts, 10 defenders had been killed and an additional 20 wounded.

Drayton's Confederate forces did not surrender. After abandoning the forts, they successfully withdrew to the mainland. Over the next few days, the victors rowed up rivers and inlets and occupied the colonial towns of Port Royal and Beaufort, as well as the fine old plantations along the sound. The Union forces also took possession of the entire string of coastal islands from Savannah almost to Charleston.

Du Pont's successful attack against Port Royal's strong shore defenses helped revive the flagging spirits of the North, which had slumped since Bull Run. The victory also mandated a revision in the tactical theories held at the start of the war. Improvements in naval ordnance and the advent of steam-powered vessels had changed the U.S. military's perception that one infantry gun was worth four sea guns. The engagement at Port Royal initiated a new phase of naval warfare by proving that warships with steam power and well-served ordnance were fully equal to forts and land-based guns.

The victory at Port Royal also inaugurated a revolution in naval tactics. The Navy no longer had to depend on tide and wind, and with the new weaponry available, forts could be challenged with a greater degree of confidence. Ships could run past forts and—given speed and room to maneuver—pound them into dust.

In some ways, however, the Union was unprepared to follow up on the initial success it enjoyed at Port Royal. From the start, all preparations had centered on attacking and seizing the forts and the sound. The Federal forces around Port Royal consolidated their holdings and then continued the stated mission of the South Atlantic fleet—to enforce the blockade and to establish a strong base at Port Royal Sound. Over the next few months, amphibious expeditions seized coastal ports as far south as St. Augustine, Fla. Fort Pulaski, Ga., was shelled and captured in April 1862.

Militarily and politically, the success at Port Royal was far beyond Union expectations, and the leadership of the Navy, as well as the North, did not know how to follow it up. As a result, the strategic potential of the plans developed by the Blockade Board was never realized. This lack of strategic vision meant that except for the attack on Port Royal and the later attack on New Orleans, there would be few joint operations against key Confederate ports, many of which remained open until late in the war. The last harbor open to blockade runners, Wilmington, N.C., did not capitulate until February 1865.

Because of his success at Port Royal, Du Pont was promoted to rear admiral in July 1862. He led a flotilla against Charleston in April 1863. The composition of that fleet was entirely different from his Port Royal force. Instead of wooden steamers, the admiral commanded a squadron of seven monitors, an armored gunboat and the metal-sheathed steamer *New Ironsides*. The armored force, however, proved no match for Charleston's strong defenses. Du Pont, who had been wary monitors' chances of success, resigned from the navy after the defeat.

The attack on Port Royal had a major impact on General Robert E. Lee, who took command of the Confederate Department of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida on November 8, 1861. As a result of his observations of the potential of the Union naval forces, Lee determined that the dispersed garrisons and forts that protected the widely scattered inlets and rivers could not be strengthened enough to defeat Union naval forces.

Accordingly, he concentrated the South's coastal guns at Charleston and Savannah. Making use of the Confederacy's interior lines of communication, Lee developed quick-reaction forces that could move along the coastal railroads to prevent a Union breakthrough.

The Confederate defeat also had a major impact on the local white population of the Port Royal Sound area, as the majority of Southern whites fled inland from the Union invaders abandoning their property and their slaves. 'You can form no idea of the terror,' Du Pont reported. 'Beaufort is deserted...the enemy flew in panic leaving public and private property, letters, portfolios, all their regimental archives, clothes, arms, etc.–they were grandly supplied.... The contrabands are wild and sacking Beaufort, in return for being shot down because they would not leave with their masters.'

The Cuthbert Family had abandoned their home in early 1861. While under the control of the Union Army, soldiers scratched their names and hometowns into the black marble of the fireplace located in what is today the East Lake Suite of The Cuthbert House Inn. This fine house was taken and later purchased at auction by General Rufus Saxton for \$1,000. General Saxton, a Medal of Honor winner, owned the house until the early 1880's when it was bought and expanded to its present day 9,300 plus square feet with a unique adaptation of a masculine Victorian style from its Federal roots in the Adams style.

William Cuthbert was able to retain ownership of the Brays Island plantation throughout the Civil War, while many other families lost their properties due to non-payment of taxes, but sadly his family's tenure was not to last much longer. After the war, William was unable to repay a loan secured by the plantation and he lost it through foreclosure in 1867. One can speculate that William tried to continue farming, but without the benefit of slave labor the enterprise was not feasible.

General Saxton was designated the "Governor of the Sea Islands" by the department of the Army when Union troops took Port Royal Sound and the surrounding areas in November 1861. His duties included the continual and successful operation of all cotton plantations confiscated on the Sea Islands. General Saxton was responsible for managing, housing, paying and recruiting the newly freed slave population for the remainder of the war. It was in this house that General Saxton entertained his old boss from the western Indian wars, General W.T. Sherman in late January 1865 after his drive to the sea and the night before his march through the Carolinas.

The Sea Islands remained in Union control throughout the war. When the wealthy planter families evacuated, leaving behind nearly 10,000 slaves, they also left behind a political, social and economic vacuum into which stepped the Union military forces. The Port Royal experiment, as abolitionists called it, became a dress rehearsal for Reconstruction. After the military victory, there was a problem defining the status of the refugee black population – they were neither slaves nor freemen.

In March 1862, Gideon missionaries arrived in Port Royal to establish schools and a hospital. In the interim, Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase developed a plan that allowed the freedmen to operate the plantations as their own, while the profit gained from the crops was given over to the Department of the Treasury.

The attack on Port Royal resulted in sweeping changes never envisioned by the Blockade Board. The aftermath of the Union victory led to the first black recruits for a Union regiment, the first schools exclusively established for former slaves and the start of a black political history.

In 1862, numerous religious and charitable groups came to Beaufort to educate the former slaves and prepare them for emancipation. Penn School, founded by Laura Towne on St. Helena Island in 1862 is one of the oldest freedmen schools in America. These philanthropic efforts were called “the Port Royal Experiment.” Beaufort became a headquarters and hospital community for the U.S. Army.

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1863, President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation was issued and General Saxton was the first to read it to the slaves living in the South. Thus the Sea Islands slaves became among the first freedmen in America. Thousands of African American soldiers were recruited into the U.S. Army to fight for their own freedom. General William Tecumseh Sherman arrived in Beaufort in January 1865, spending one night at the **Cuthbert House**.

With Beaufort in Union hands and Pocotaligo held by Confederates, Brays Island became something of a no-man's-land. It is unclear whether William remained on the plantation and tried to carry on farming. It is known that the Confederates maintained a gun emplacement at the south end of Goat Island. Because of this, the Federals must have considered Brays an enemy target, and the Brays Island plantation house was shelled and destroyed by a Union gunboat steaming up the Pocotaligo.

### *The post-Civil War Era*

On April 26, 1865, the Civil War ended. By then, Beaufort and the Sea Islands had become a colony of African American freedmen and Northern merchants. The Civil War totally transformed Beaufort. The 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution ended slavery, guaranteed civil rights, and gave the vote to the freedmen. Beaufort’s African American majority controlled politics for three decades. The political leader of Beaufort was Robert Smalls, former slave, civil war hero and five-term U.S. congressman.

Through reconstruction, Beaufort was also transformed from a plantation economy to a commercial and industrial one. In 1873, the Port Royal and Augusta railroad delivered coal, and trans-Atlantic steamships frequented Port Royal Sound. In 1877, the U.S. Navy established a coaling station and bought land on Parris Island.

Phosphate rock was discovered on the river bottoms and from 1870 to 1893, Beaufort County was the leading domestic source of phosphates, providing 3,000 local jobs. The commercial and industrial leader of reconstruction Beaufort was Duncan Campbell Wilson, a native of Greenock, Scotland.

On August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1893, one of the deadliest hurricanes in U.S. history struck Beaufort. Most of the Sea Islands were inundated. The phosphate works were completely destroyed. Nearly 2,000 people were drowned. The course of Beaufort history was changed.

The phosphate industry went into rapid decline and was gone by 1914. The Port Royal and Augusta Railroad went bankrupt and was merged with the Charleston and Western Carolina Line

in 1896. The U.S. Navy abandoned their coaling station and dry dock in 1901. The maritime traffic slowed to a trickle, and the Port of Beaufort was officially closed in 1933.

The cotton industry was unprofitable for 15 years before World War I. In 1917, the Boll Wivell (a beetle which feeds on cotton buds and flowers) appeared in Beaufort County and by 1920, cotton was gone. Vegetable farming replaced cotton for a few farmers, but the principal pillars of the reconstruction economy disappeared by the 1920's. The Beaufort Bank failed in 1926.

The South Carolina Constitution of 1895 imposed "Jim Crow" laws on Beaufort County. The African American republican ascendancy of reconstruction was replaced by white democratic political dominance. Massive out migration resulted in Beaufort County's population declining by 38% between 1890 and 1940. By the 1930's, Beaufort County was one of the poorest places in America. Over half of the African American population moved away. By 1960, there was a white majority for the first time in Beaufort's history.

Despite the long depression, progress was made in transportation and education. Automobile travel prompted highway construction. Bridges built across the Whale branch river in 1908 and the Beaufort River in 1927 connected the Sea Islands to the mainland. Beaufort High School for whites was opened in 1909 and Robert Smalls High School for African American was opened in 1919.

The U.S. Marine Corps commissioned the Parris Island Recruit Depot in 1915. Seventy percent of the Marines who served in France in World War One were trained on Parris Island. In 1938, the U.S. military buildup for World War 2 began. Large construction contracts on Parris Island provided jobs for much of the region. Marine Corps training doubled in 1941. After Pearl Harbor, Parris Island became the largest population center in Beaufort County. During World War II, 241,000 Marines completed boot camp on Parris Island, ten times the population of Beaufort County in 1940. In 1943, the U.S. Navy opened the Naval Air Station north of Beaufort. The Naval Air Station was decommissioned in 1946.

### *The post-World War II Era*

During World War II, Beaufort was a boom town. Jobs and prosperity overcame the poverty of the 1930s. World War II and the U.S. Marine Corps began Beaufort post-war prosperity.

The Marine Corps built-up continued with the advent of the Korean War, the Cold War and the Vietnam War. In 1955, the Naval Air Station was recommissioned as the Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort.

In 1956, a new toll bridge was built to Hilton Head Island. Beach and golf resorts followed. In 1957, the Broad River Bridge opened, linking the two halves of the county. A real estate boom began that has continued for over 50 years. Beaufort County became the fastest growing and richest per capita in the state.

Beginning in 1949, the U.S. Marine Corps racially integrated its training and operations, and in 1970, Beaufort County public schools fully integrated. Modern Beaufort outgrew the legacy of the segregated South.



In 1973, historic Beaufort was designated as a historic landmark district. In 1974, the Waterfront Park was opened. The 300-year old town has since become a magnet for tourists, artists, writers and movie makers.