



The following paper on Rockville was given by Sophia Seabrook Jenkins to the Wadmalaw Island P.T.A. at their October meeting, 1957.

The material for the paper was gathered from references in histories of South Carolina, from the Charleston newspapers (particularly the News and Courier), from family records, from a *Commemorative History of St. John's Parish*, from other church histories, from tradition, from wills and other sources, and from memory.

ROCKVILLE

WADMALAW ISLAND, S. C.

This sketch will be presented in chronological order, yet it will be difficult to find a beginning date for the village on the bank of the Bohicket. Every story should have a beginning; therefore, recognizing the play of history—the importance of heredity upon the child, yet unborn—we will turn time back about three hundred years and start with a look at the colonial background of our community.

In the charters of 1663 and 1665 Charles II of Great Britain gave to eight noblemen, the Lords Proprietors they were called, all the lands south of Virginia from the 29° to 36° 30' N. Latitude, and lying between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. This vast territory was called Carolina in honor of the King.

In 1666 the Proprietors sent Lt. Col. Robert Sandford on a voyage to explore the coast and rivers between Cape Romain and Port Royal. Sandford and his men were experienced voyagers, familiar with the waters and islands of the West Indies. They gave a glowing account of the fertility of the land of the Carolina coast, and expressed the belief that a colony of English planted there would in a very short time improve themselves to a perfect commonwealth. This voyage led directly to the establishment in 1670 of Charles Town on the Ashley River.

Let us see what Sandford had to say, in part at least, about the exploratory voyage of 1666. He told about sailing into the North Edisto River from the sea, and to one familiar with the shore lines and the banks, his description is as fitting today as then. He spoke of the live oaks, the level land "of a habitable height generally—on which in many places we could see the fields of maize greenly flourishing." The next day, he said, being the 23rd of June, he went into

a creek on the east shore—"a very fair and deep creek, or river," and having gone a mile, landed, and in the presence of his company took formal possession "by turf and twig" of that whole country from the latitude of 36° N, to 29° S.W. to the South Seas by the name of the Province of Carolina for "our Soveraigne Lord Charles II, King of England and to the use" of the Proprietors. The fair and deep creek he mentioned was none other than the Bohicket, and the place where he took possession for the Crown was most probably the present site of Rockville.

Many years, however, must have passed before a settlement came into being. Despite Indians, and threats of invasion from the Spanish and French, the sea islands south of Charleston were soon peopled. There were land grants prior to 1700; and for protection the men of the islands formed military companies at an early date. There is a record of an island company going to the defense of Charleston in 1706.

The way of life on Wadmalaw Island, as on the other islands, was the plantation system. From records of the early 1700's one finds the following family names on Wadmalaw—Morton, Wilkinson, Jenkins, LaRoche, Seabrook, Sams, Fickling, Adams, Reynolds, Townsend, and Waight. Jenkinses, Seabrooks, and Townsends still live on the Island, and the blood of some of the others runs in the bodies of their descendants. One or two other names have only survived as place names.

Living on their plantations, the families found themselves subject to fevers. One of the worst was malaria. Today we know malaria is caused by the bite of a mosquito, but then it was thought due to exposure to swamp air. The condition was prevalent in the summer. For health reasons, therefore, the plantation families sought and found for themselves summer locations on some bold salt river. Thus the villages came into existence. James Island had its Secessionville; Johns Island, Legareville; Edisto Island, Edingsville; and Wadmalaw Island, Rockville. The houses were summer homes and were not elaborate. They were fairly large, with numerous windows and wide piazzas—features to insure comfort against the heat.

The name Rockville is derived, supposedly, from the deposits of ore which jutted from the bluff along the entire waterfront. Today there is only a small outcropping near the lot of Mrs. J. J. Wilson. The rest, we have been told, was removed during Federal occupa-

tion during the 1860's or 70's. The colored people have always spoken of Rockville as "Rocks," and engraved on the old Bible in use at Grace Chapel, Rockville, is the inscription, "given to the church on the Rock, 1842."

Benjamin Jenkins, Jr., of Wadmalaw Island (living between the dates 1763 and 1820) and his brother Samuel owned the plantation called the "Rocks." This plantation was inherited from their father, Benjamin, who bought it Dec. 20, 1771. Quoting from the Jenkins family record (S. C. Historical & Genealogical Magazine, vol. XX, No. 4, published 1919), "this plantation, known as the 'Rocks,' comprised 496 acres and was located in part where the village of Rockville now is." The plantation lying west of the public road and adjoining Rockville is presently known as "Rocklands." In our own memories, lots in the rear of the village have been carved from that plantation, and a goodly part of it owned by members of the Townsend family, which family since ante-bellum days owned the plantation. Another early reference to Rockville can be found in the Vestry Minutes of St. John's Church where one reads that a meeting was held at the "Rocklanding on Wadmalaw," December, 1787.

Benjamin Jenkins sold his portion of the "Rocks" plantation in 1809 to Benjamin Adams—this no doubt accounts for the name Adams Creek which runs to the west of Rockville. As for Breakfast Creek, which skirts the western edge of the village—who can doubt but that an early cast in its water gave the inhabitants a tasty breakfast of shrimp!

As yet, we have not discovered when Rockville came into existence; but we do know that the oldest house there is the house of Micah Jenkins, planter of John's Island. This was his summer house, and since he was born in 1754 and married before 1780, it is possible that the house was erected by, or before, 1780. Micah was a nephew of Benjamin Jenkins, who bought the "Rocks" plantation in 1771. It is possible that he bought the lot from his uncle. The house, in an excellent state of preservation, a story and a half, with basement rooms, faces the Bohicket river. The house is best known today as the Whaley house, as the Whaleys, or some of their descendants, have lived there, or owned it, prior to and since 1900.

After 1800 other houses were built along the water front. The old Rectory (now owned by Bishop Albert Thomas) was bought by St. Johns Church in 1836 as a summer home for its ministers. The

lot with house was formerly owned by John Wilson. The lot just behind the Rectory lot (where the S. F. Morses now live) was sold by the same John Wilson to Charles E. Fripp, and in 1855 the widow Fripp, by deed, described it as that "lot of land -- lying and being at the Rocks, or Rockville, Wadmalaw Island." Two other very old houses (owned until recently by Townsend and Sosnowski families), set high from the ground on tabby basements and pillars, were built by two Townsend brothers in the early 30's--before 1835. The house to the west was the summer residence of John F. Townsend, later State Senator; and the other belonged to Dr. Daniel Jenkins Townsend. The house of John Townsend in later years had the distinction of being the birthplace of Congressman George S. Legare.

Other ante-bellum houses still in existence are: Major Daniel Jenkins' house (now owned by Con Stevens), the James LaRoche house (now the home of Mrs. W. E. Jenkins), the Joseph LaRoche house (now Mr. Allen's), the Bailey house (now the Perry's), and Mrs. Claude Whaley's house built by Edward Bailey who was noted for fine construction. Mr. Bailey also built the old house with its mahogany stair at Red House Plantation. Two other houses in Rockville, still standing, were built before 1860, or shortly thereafter. They are the Benjamin Bailey house on the waterfront (the Harry Jenkins' home) and the house at the back of the village once owned by Dr. D. J. Townsend (now the home of his great-grandson, Harry Townsend).

Other ante-bellum houses no longer standing were the Bentz house near Breakfast Creek, once owned by a Chisolm family; the Daniel LaRoche house on the lot where the Sea Island Yacht Club now stands; the Richard J. LaRoche house on the waterfront lot between the Joseph LaRoche house and the Sosnowski house. At the other end of the village, where the George Seabrooks are living, that large area was broken up into several lots as follows: next to E. C. Whaley was a lot owned by Miss Susan Townsend; next to her lot was the lot and house of George Washington Seabrook (the great-grandfather of the present George); the strip to the east of that was broken into two parts--the house on the front lot belonged to Major Dick Jenkins, the back lot had a house occupied by Dr. and Mrs. James Clark Seabrook. The two ladies, Mrs. Seabrook and Mrs. Jenkins, were daughters of the elder Richard LaRoche and sisters of James, Richard, Daniel and Joseph who have been mentioned as owning lots. They were sisters, also, of Mrs. M. J. Jenkins who later

bought the house of Major Daniel Jenkins. The elder Richard LaRoche, drawing his will in 1843, left to his wife--among other properties--his house and lot in Rockville. Just which lot this was has not been determined. These, then, were the residences of ante-bellum Rockville. They were spread along the Bohicket and fanned out along the eastern and western ends of the peninsula. At a later date--much later--Rockville began to grow on the land side, a second row of houses appeared, then a third row, and that growth is still in progress, spreading along the highway that enters the village.

Also belonging to the ante-bellum era are the two churches Grace Chapel, the chapel-of-ease for St. John's Church located on Johns Island, was completed in 1840 and first occupied the lot behind the home of Mrs. W. E. Jenkins. The title to the lot proving uncertain, the chapel was moved to its present location in 1884, the land being given by Elizabeth F. Jenkins (Mrs. M. J. Jenkins) --a gift we have heard, to the Episcopal ladies of the community. The Presbyterian church was probably built in the 1850's. Mrs. James G. Seabrook, Jr., had a letter in her possession, written by her grandfather, John F. Townsend, to his oldest daughter, Phoebe (when Phoebe was attending school in Columbia) in which he mentioned "we are just finishing our little church." This church was built with a gallery across the back, and it had, until the storm of 1893, a tall and handsome steeple. At the tender age of seventeen Mrs. W. E. Jenkins (then Julie Jenkins) wrote some "Lines on Rockville." One stanza bears a reference to the steeple:

"I've seen the full moon in her beauty arise
And shed her soft rays o'er the earth and skies
And the old church steeple has borrowed the gleam
Which lent its brightness to woodland and stream."

Rockville, along with other parts of the coast, has felt the whip of nature's fury. The worst catastrophes were the earthquake of 1886 and the hurricane of 1893. The earthquake was unique. Negroes, even in the interior of the State, called it the "Big Shake." Of course, the "Big Shake" was followed by numerous small ones. In places the earth split apart, and chimneys cracked or fell. People left their homes and camped out of doors. It was a time of terror and mounting religious fervor. The hurricane of '93 brought with it a tidal wave. The distress was so great that the Red Cross, in its infancy at that time, sent help, and Miss Clara Barton, its president, visited Rock-

ville. As a result of that storm Rockville lost some of its waterfront; for older residents remember when great oaks stood between the houses and the river, and carriages could be driven the entire length of the village.

Mention should be made of the 1860's and 70's when the people of Rockville, in common with other Southerners, suffered the consequences of war—loss of life and fortune; and the indignities of Reconstruction. By order of the Confederate government, the people of the rural coastal areas were forced to leave their homes, and retire into the interior of the State for the four years of war. This enforced order was for protection, because Federal gunboats came into the rivers, and raids were made upon the islands. In fact, before the war was over engagements were fought on Seabrook and Johns Islands. One can imagine the state of things when the former residents returned home—if, in every instance, there was a home to return to. The homes were generally inhabited by negroes who took advantage of the opportunity to move into better quarters. Many of the houses bear the marks of their occupancy. During the Reconstruction period, the Freedman's Bureau maintained an office in Rockville. One of the Reconstruction governors of South Carolina, Chamberlain of Massachusetts, had a plantation on the back of Wadmalaw Island (Pawley's Point). The aftermath of war was poverty, and because many were not able to pay their taxes there was a considerable shifting of land titles.

To commemorate their ties, the veterans of the Confederacy for many years held an annual reunion in Rockville. There is a card dated June 29, 1907, addressed to one of the veterans which reads:

"Dear Comrade:

Please remember that at 12 M., July 10, you are expected to answer to your name at Rockville. It may be your last chance to answer on this side of the river. Professor Seabrook will deliver an address on The Invincible Major Jenkins' Command, and more especially on the fight at Haulover Cut (Johns Island), when he with 182 repulsed 4500 of the enemy.

The train will leave Charleston 6:30 A.M. for Yonges Island, where the steamer will take all passengers along the route for Rockville.

In the "Backward Glances" column of the *News and Courier*—news our grandfathers read July 11, 1902, we read the following account:

"Rockville, one of the most picturesque and delightful places on the Atlantic Coast, presented an animated and attractive scene Wednesday, the occasion being the annual reunion of Camp John Jenkins, U.C.V. The attendance was large, the proceedings were interesting, and the event one of the most enjoyable in the calendar of this patriotic organization.

"The meeting was held in the hall recently erected, which was filled. Lovely ladies graced the meeting by their charming presence. Gallant veterans of the Confederate Army and spirited young men were in attendance. Owing to the absence of Major John Jenkins, the distinguished commander of the camp, Capt. E. L. Rivers, lieutenant commander, presided.

"The roll was called by Adj. Townsend Mikell — — — The dinner was fine, with an abundance of the choicest fare. The supply greatly exceeded the demand.

"The citizens of Rockville handsomely entertained the visitors in the evening."

No history of Rockville would be complete without mentioning a lady who contributed greatly to its cultural life. This lady, Mrs. Frank Whaley, was the teacher in the village for many years—possibly forty years. She first taught in the basement of her home, and shortly before the turn of the twentieth century moved operations to a small school building in the back of the Village. It was a day when "Spare the rod, spoil the child" was the rule. Switches then played their part in the educative process and the children learned that the three R's were to be taken seriously. Stress was also laid on the fine art of penmanship. From the village school, the boys went to Dr. Porter's school in Charleston, and girls to the Confederate Home School in the same city. Very old residents can remember a teacher before Mrs. Whaley's time—Mr. Ben Bailey (Stono Ben he was called).

It might be interesting to know that once, briefly, Rockville was the site of the postoffice—known as Bohicket. This was in the 1890's, or early 1900's. The postmistress was Mrs. Thomas Seabrook (Belle).

In the old days travel between the islands or to Charleston was entirely by boat or ferry. Katherine Drayton Mayrant Simons in her "Boats of Charleston Harbor" wrote:

"The Pilot Boy, for Rockville,
Beaufort and Edisto,
That used to sight Savannah light
On voyages long ago;"

Even when the 20th century opened, Rockville was as remote as ever. Roads were unpaved; only Wadmalaw and Johns Island were tied together by bridge. Transportation to the other islands or to Charleston was still by boat. The "Lotta," under the command of Capt. Henry Bullwinkle made Rockville its port of call perhaps twice a week. The other boat by which one could go to Edisto or Charleston was the "Mary Draper" (sometimes the "Brigantine"), owned and operated by the Stevens brothers. Going to the city, one left Rockville about 6:30 o'clock in the morning, stopping always at Edisto and at a point on the back of Wadmalaw to pick up passengers and freight; then debarked at Yonges Island to take the train to Ravenel, connecting there with the train from Savannah. One arrived finally in Charleston about eleven o'clock, and had then about three hours in which to attend to business, or shop. In the afternoon and early evening, the trip was reversed. There is a story about two Islanders meeting in the Union Station in Charleston and getting so interested in their conversation that all other matters went by the board and the train left without them. It was the custom, especially on summer evenings, to meet the incoming boat, for the boat's arrival was a break in the quiet day of the village.

To say that Rockville had no social life would be erroneous. Though the families of the late 1800's and early 1900's were more or less impoverished by the war, they had inherited the tastes of a wealthy ante-bellum society. The grown-ups played chess and whist, "Marooned" (as it was then called) on the beach, had occasional horse races and tilting contests, fished and hunted. The young found entertainment in song and dance. To gather at the waterfront, there to sit on the benches, to watch the moonlight on the river was a summer evening habit, only broken by repairing to the hall on the old green where the two-step or the waltz was danced to music from the accordian or violin. One wonders if the young people of today have as happy a time.

Rockville, of course, is best known for its annual yacht races. This event for the three days of its duration completely shakes the calm of the old village. These races started in a small way about 1890 with two young cousins, John F. Sosnowski of Wadmalaw and Jenkins Mikell of Edisto, putting their boats to the test. James C. Seabrook, who was to be the captain of the Wadmalaw entry for the next twenty years sailed on that first race with Sosnowski. Two years later, he, with the two Sosnowski brothers, built the "Bohicket" and sailed her for several seasons. About 1894 another competitor was heard from—Reynolds Jenkins brought the "Swan" from James Island. In 1895 when the Sams family moved to Rockville they brought with them their boat the "Marguerite." This boat was sailed by a son of the family who, following in his father's footsteps, later became the Rev. Williams B. Sams. By these new competitors the "Bohicket" was evidently outclassed, because Sosnowski and Seabrook again ventured into boat building, and produced the first "Undine,"—the name of the Wadmalaw boat until this day. The year was then 1899, and James Island came with a new entry—the "Lizzie Bee" to be sailed for a number of years by "Capt." George Seabrook. In that contest the "Lizzie Bee" proved the better boat, and the "Undine" was drastically changed and improved. For years these two boats vied with each other, bringing the two islands together in friendly rivalry. Enthusiasm, as well as the crowds, grew with the years. The Rockville houses burst at their seams to hold kith and kin for the event; special trips of the steamers and smaller boats brought people from as far away as Charleston, and further. The racing in the afternoons was followed by dances at night; and it was literally true in the words of the song, "we danced the whole night through."

The races had by this time become too large for a few private individuals to handle. Shortly after the turn of the century, yacht clubs were formed, and at one time or another Edisto, Johns Island, Mount Pleasant, Beaufort, the Charleston clubs, and the perpetually active clubs of James Island and Wadmalaw sailed their boats from Rockville on what is said to be the finest race course from Wilmington to Savannah. Shortly after the organization of the individual clubs, they banded themselves together as the Sea Island Yacht Club, and this club has sponsored the event ever since. A year of war, and another summer when there was a polio epidemic, have been the only interruptions in the continuity of the races. Other skippers

of the "Undine" besides the first veteran should be mentioned because they gave unstintingly of their time and sailing talent. Following the first Captain Seabrook, was Captain Walter Townsend who held the helm for several years; then Oliver Seabrook, who skippered for almost as many years as his father; next James Swinton Townsend II (Cap'n Billy) who sailed the "Undine" in several races, but may be better remembered as skipper of the "Mat." Next there was John Whaley who showed his love for the sport early in his school years. John sailed for several years and seems to have been the last regular skipper. Since then it has been one and then another; but the "Undine" stays in the race—a boat to be reckoned with, and to stir the hearts of Wadmalaw.

In connection with the races, it should be mentioned that when the old "Green" was sold, two Edistonians, E. Mitchell Seabrook, and Oliver W. Seabrook gave the lot at the west end of the waterfront (the old Daniel Jenkins lot) to the Sea Island Yacht Club for permanent quarters. There the old hall was moved, but it was replaced in the 1930's by the present structure with its wide piazza. There each August hundreds of people gather to watch the Sea Island Regatta. We will end this sketch of Rockville with stanzas from a poem by the Rev. Robert W. Barnwell who knew the coast well, and loved this part of it.

"And on thy bank, Bohicket, Rockville stands—
Fair Rockville, midst her groves and flowers.
Her non-pareilles, both birds and girls, in bands,
Flash through the trees, with music fill the hours—
A rippling tide of gladness through the hamlet pours.

When cares of life, Bohicket, mastered me,

Fain was I then to anchor in thy stream.
Thy farms, thy Rockville, marshes, breeze and sea
Brought me to peace: and still you flow in blissful dream,
Bright as the morn of life, with glint and gleam.

So sheltered by the marsh; so near the sea;
So compassed round with groves and fields;
So winsome to the birds that flock to thee,
So decked with all the flowers that nature yields,
Thou art a Queen, indeed, who sceptre wields."