

[Old Families, Spanish Grants]

26058 Nassau Co. - Fernandina - old Families - J. J. G. Cooper, Interview by [?]

November 22, [1939?].

J. J. G. Cooper,

Fernandina, Florida.

Personal Interview

(Cont)

Rose Shepherd, Writer

OLD FAMILIES, SPANISH [GRANTS?], AND OLD

PLANTATIONS OF NASSAU COUNTY. (Cont)

- : - MAJOR JAMES PELOT:

In the year 1800, Major James [Pelot?], who had married Susan Morian Cooper, lost all his negroes by their escape on board a British warship right here on Amelia Island.

In 1818 he lost all of his property and negroes by the soldiers of the United States.

In 1836 his family was reimbursed in part for the latter loss which was known in the family as the "Spanish [Claim?]" by payment of \$25,000 by the United States Government.

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Major James Pelot was the son of Rev. Francis Pelot, who was a wealthy plantation owner of near Charleston, S. C., and later became a famous preacher of his day, founded and built one of the largest Charleston churches.

James Pelot was born on his father's plantation near Charleston, called "Ercherode." when the Revolution came he entered the service and went to war. He was taken prisoner at [ursburg?], and held prisoner until the war closed.

In the United States census of [1790?] he was in South Carolina with his wife, two sons — one 16 and one 2 — two daughters, and thirteen slaves.

His brother, Major Charles Pelot, who also fought in the 2 Revolutionary War appears in this same census, with his wife, one son under sixteen, one daughter, and seventy-one slaves.

As early as [1707?] Major James Pelot, and his son, Francis, are found on Amelia Island, where James had a very large grant from the Spanish Government.

His plantation adjoined those of John Vaughan and Robert Harrison, three families inter-married and related by marriage to many of the finest in the South. The Vaughan family and the Pelot family are tied up with old Savannah families.

The Harrison grant was five [hundred?] acres, and the Pelot grant, six hundred and forty acres.

These people and other early settlers, the Browards and [Thorpes?] lived around Darion, Georgia, but the land was [swampy?], the climate unhealthy, with long [sieges?] of malaria and lingering fevers, so they left their rice fields and all their land in charge of slave and set out in a body to [fin?] find a more healthful location. They came in their boats with their families, and some of their negroes, and landed at the end of the Island where Fernandina now is, and near the [?] grant, where Amelia city is. They scattered out, all but

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Sam Harrison, he decided to settle right on the end of the Island, so his is the first of these plantations. The others came farther up the island and settled. The Thorpes and Browards went on over on the mainland to what is now Sawpit, and the Thorpes had two hundred acres of the best land in the South. Mrs. Thorpe managed it, and with her slaves raised everything they needed for food and supplies, horses, cattle, and Sea Island cotton. She was such a wonderful success that she was called “Queenie” Thorpe. Now, the land is nothing but swamp.

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The Browards located near what is now Duval Station. Recently, a descendant , of Mrs. Thorpe's told me that in an old house in the Carolinas owned by the family for many years, she had found some letters in the attic telling of this migration to Amelia Island and their settlement there. The letters stated they came into the little Spanish city of Fernandina and saw the officers in charge and obtained their grants the next day. The Spanish authorities told them they would have to live on the land a certain time to obtain their final title from the Spanish Government representatives at St. Augustine.

I have found many old papers and made transcripts of the papers of the Harrison family, who came about 1790, and received their grant in 1796. This testimony shows just what had been raised the [previous?] year on the Harrison plantation and how much money they had received in Spanish gold for their crops — rice, cattle, corn, Sea Island cotton, and the testimony showed that this was one of the finest plantations in the South.

Another very interesting thing in connection with this testimony was that it stated in one of the buildings they had a machine for separating the seed from the cotton.

I have been told that [?] Whitney, who invented the cotton gin — I believe in 1790 — of probably 1792 — visited on Cumberland Island about that time [across?] from Fernandina and it is probable he met the plantation owners and that this, one of his early machines, was used on the Harrison plantation.

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This transcript of testimony I turned over to Mrs. Ray Harrison, of Jacksonville, Florida, whose husband is a direct descendant of this Sam Harrison.

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The sons of this first Harrison were Robert, Sam and [Ephraim?]. They divided up the land.

Robert Harrison had a son who was a Major. He married Mary Cooper who was a sister of General James Cooper who married the Vaughan girl.

The first Robert Harrison was an officer of some kind in the English army, while his wife Mary's father was an officer of the Revolutionary Army.

Ephraim Harrison married Julia Cooper, a [?] granddaughter of old Col. John Cooper. Their son was Sam Harrison, Sr., one of whose sons was Ray Harrison, and the other is Col. Sam Harrison, now of the United States Army in the Phillipines.

Robert Harrison had a son, Robert Harrison, who was a Major in the Confederate Army, serving with considerable distinction, and spent the rest of his life after the War between the States, on the old plantation.

After the War was over, Major Robert Harrison deeded part of one thousand acres which he had acquired just South of the original Harrison plantation to different slaves he had owned who remained faithful, and their descendants still live on this land up towards the other end of the Island, known as Franklin-town.

I made out a will for Ellen Drummond, one of these slaves, on May 25, 1929, in her nineties then, and she must have been nearly a hundred when she died. She spoke the most perfect English. Aunt Ellen, as everybody called her, said she acquired her good education by sitting in the back of the school-room 5 on the plantation while the children were receiving their education from private tutors, and she learned just as they did.

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Morris Drummond, one of [?] Ellen's sons, has the largest section of this land and lives there now with sons of his children. His father was Major Harrison's body servant during the War, and his grandmother was Mary Cooper's personal maid, that she brought with her when she came to be married.

In the courthouse here in the first book of deeds is a re-record made in 1854 of a deed made by the first Robert Harrison in trust to John Vaughan, his neighbor, also Col. John Cooper, his father-in-law, and James, brother of Col. John Cooper, Harrison reciting that "whereas, on June 13, 1810, he was to be married to Mary E. Cooper, of Darion, Georgia, that he made this trust of all three plantations and one hundred slaves."

It was the custom in these days, when a man was going to be married, to put a considerable portion of his property in trust for his wife, so that if he had any business reverses, she would be protected.

This deed was probably recorded in the early days and the records destroyed by fire, of which we have no date, and the deed re-recorded in the first book of records. (A little thin book).

The fine old homes of these plantations were destroyed during the War between the States by the Northern troops on one of their visits to Amelia Island.

(To be continued)