

The Harrison Family and the Harrison Family Cemetery
Submitted by Mary Mallinson Long,
great-great-great-great-granddaughter of Samuel and Elizabeth Harrison.

The Harrison Family Cemetery (http://www.aigensoc.org/cemetery_Harrison.asp) is a small family cemetery with only 29 known family graves. It occupies a portion of the last remaining acre still owned by the family. The cemetery also holds the remains of 180 Guale Indians of the Mission Santa Catalina De Guale. The mission was founded on Harrison Creek by Spanish Franciscan Friars in 1685 and destroyed by English raiders in 1702. The Indians were exhumed from their original burial grounds during the 1985 archeological excavation of the Spanish Mission, known as the Dorian Dig, and reburied in our cemetery.

The Harrison family came to Amelia Island in 1790, approximately 15 years after leaving their holdings in Yorktown, VA, during the Revolutionary War. William Harrison was a Captain in the British Navy and moved his family from the American colonies to an English colony in Honduras. William's grown son, Samuel Harrison along with his wife Elizabeth McQueen English (who later became the "ghost of Harrison Homestead"), their children Samuel and Margaret, and seven slaves came to Spanish Florida and settled on Amelia Island. In 1793, he was granted 500 acres of land under a land grant by the King of Spain. According to some accounts, Samuel Harrison was granted another 250 acres after five years and meeting agricultural production requirements. Harrison Plantation, affectionately dubbed "Harrison Homestead", covered much of the southern part of Amelia Island, encompassing land from Nassau Sound to Amelia River to the Atlantic Ocean. According to one account, "The plantation was the home of more than 100 Negro slaves during the Civil War" (file from Amelia Island Museum, attributed to Willie Mae [illegible], Afro-American History, 96.16.2) and produced sea-island cotton and sugar cane.

The location of the house was on what is now the only undeveloped lot on the marsh side of Harrison Creek in Amelia Island Plantation's private homes, and beside the former location of the Spanish Mission Santa Catalina De Guale. By some accounts, the union soldiers burned the Harrison mansion (Alice P. Youngblood), but other accounts say the family burned it to keep it from falling into the hands of the union army (Robert Hamilton).

Another house was built on the same grounds, a two story wooden house with large screen porches, along with a cottage. Portions of the acreage were sold over the centuries, including the area now known as American Beach.

The final 35 acres were sold in 1972 to become part of what is now known as Amelia Island Plantation. Exempted from the sale was one acre which includes Harrison Cemetery; this is all that remains of the previous 750 acres of Harrison Plantation.

The last of the Harrison descendants to live on "Harrison Homestead" prior to it selling were Minnie Alexandrina Hamilton Huggins and her husband Liston O'Neal Huggins. Minnie was my

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great aunt, and younger sister of my grandfather, Evelyn Harrison Hamilton. Their mother was Mary Lee “Mamie” Jones, born on Amelia Island in the bend of what is now known as “Historic Canopy Road”. Mary Lee Jones married Liday Elury (L.E.) Hamilton, Sr. in 1887. Her crushed pearl-stone beaded, silk wedding dress, their wedding photo, and other items were gifted by her grandchildren to the Amelia Island Museum where they are on display. (As a note, he is buried in Jonesboro City Cemetery in Jonesboro, Clayton County, Georgia, while their son with the same name is buried in Harrison Cemetery). They used the island homestead as a summer home but lived in Jacksonville in the grand Sanderson family home, which burned in the 1901 Great Jacksonville Fire. Unable to rebuild, they moved to Atlanta to be near other family, particularly her “sister- cousin” Minnie Alexandrina Sanderson (who inherited “Harrison Homestead” and later passed it to Evelyn Harrison Hamilton). However, before they left, they salvaged “a massive cast-iron fence, imported from England” which had enclosed the yard of their Jacksonville home. According to accounts by Mary Lee Jones Hamilton, it now “is used around the family burying grounds on Amelia Island” (The Old Sanderson Home-Jacksonville, Florida by Mary Lee Hamilton, date unknown). However, only a few wrought iron posts now remain at the cemetery; it is unknown what became of the “massive” fence.

Mary Lee and L.E. had six children, four boys (Rob, L.E., Marion, Evelyn) and two girls (Susie, Minnie). Minnie Alexandrina Hamilton was the youngest and was named after her Aunt Minnie Alexandrina Sanderson (as is my mother, Minnie Sanderson Hamilton Mallinson). As previously stated, Minnie Alexandrina Hamilton married Liston O’Neal Huggins. Liston served as an infantry soldier in WW1 and was a victim of mustard gas. He survived but suffered from residual effects with lung and breathing problems.

After the war, they lived in Atlanta where he was a banker. His doctor advised him that for his health, he should leave the stress of banking and city life, and return to fresh air and calm settings. With this advice, they left Atlanta around 1930 and moved into the home at “Harrison Homestead” where Liston became a fisherman. He delighted in fishing, and they loved the serenity of life on the island. However, over the years, Liston’s health declined, and on New Year’s Day, 1951, he drowned while fishing in Harrison Creek. Heartbroken, Minnie returned to Decatur (near Atlanta) to live with her sister, Susie, until her death in 1973. By this time, “Harrison Homestead” had been passed to Rev. Dr. Evelyn Harrison Hamilton. He and his wife Estelle McAlpine Hamilton devoted their lives to Christian missionary work in China, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, returning to “Harrison Homestead” for visits while on furlough, and finally retiring to Decatur, Georgia near his sisters. They are both now buried in Harrison Cemetery.

Most family members have left the island, with some still living in the Atlanta area and returning to visit regularly. Even though our family does not currently live on the island, we

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have fond memories of its breezes which stir thoughts of family stories and songs of the Harrison-Sanderson-Jones-Hamilton families. Harrison Cemetery may be small but it is a true relic of the past, spanning five centuries and holding the remains of individuals who greatly contributed to the history of Amelia Island.

Minnie Alexandrina Sanderson called Amelia Island “Inisheen”, Irish for “Little Isle”. She wrote the following poem providing us a glimpse into an earlier time on Amelia Island.

Inisheen

Island of beauty with opaline sunsets, Circled by dancing and sparkling waves,
I see in my dreaming thy rippling runlets, And Hear the sweet music of coral-reef caves.
Over thy fields where the goldenrod glittered, Through forests where jessamine tangled its
vine,
In hollows where early spring violets were littered, Like shy, sweet blue eyes in the sun’s yellow
shine.
All through these fairy scenes known to our childhood How gaily young feet their bright beauty
explored!
What joyous glad voices rang through the deep wildwood! With such priceless pictures my
memory is stored.
All through the years that have gone from my keeping Floats the loved voice of thy shell-girdled
shore;
Shrine where the dust of my fathers is sleeping, And dim, holy stars keep their watch
evermore.

Minnie Alexandrina Sanderson, 1895

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