

THE PLANTATION ERA AT CAUSTON BLUFF

Causton Bluff's most beautiful time had to be the era of its plantations. Three plantations thrived here from 1733 to 1908. Settlers were told early on by the English trustees who issued the land grants that they did not approve of slavery but later the availability and use of slaves in the colonies became widespread. The trustees never changed their position but were known to ease the restriction in some cases.

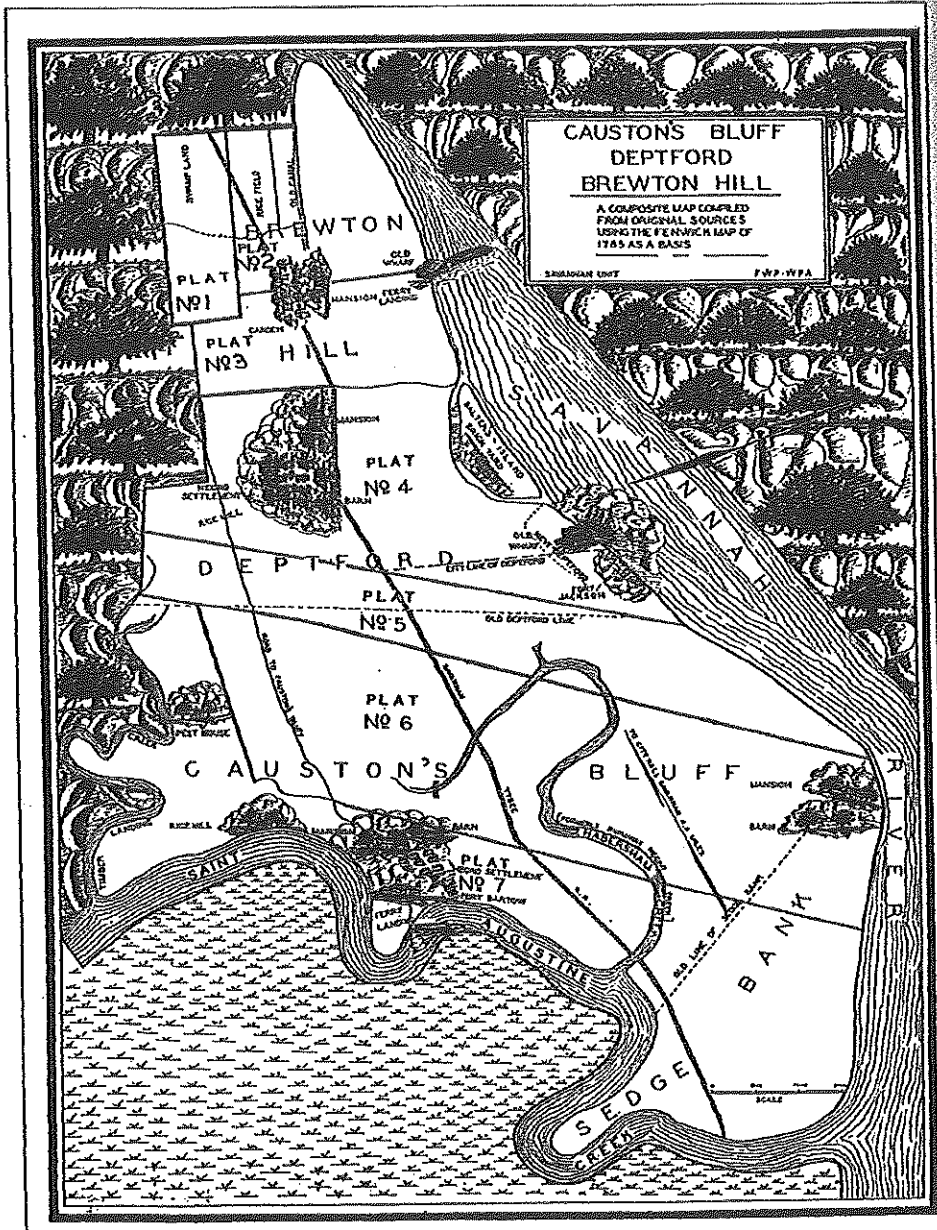
Entering the Causton Bluff area from the west you would first see Brewton Hill Plantation with its mansion and rice field. Continuing east you would have passed through Deptford Plantation and its mansion, rice fields and its brick-producing yard down by the river. Lastly, you would come to Causton Bluff Plantation with a mansion and all types of agricultural activity including mulberry, grapes, and rice. A little further down the hill you would find a settlement near the river which boasted a general store, a ferry landing, rice mill, barn, a negro settlement and another mansion. During the Civil War Causton Bluff became the site for an earthen fort to be named Fort Bartow in honor of General Francis Bartow who was killed at the battle of Manassas.

In 1733 Thomas Causton, an Englishman, was awarded a land grant east of where General Oglethorpe chose to establish the beginnings of the colony of Georgia. Causton's 260 acres of the total 2,500 acres came with some provisions. The trustees were hopeful that the development of considerable social and agricultural activity would create a community that would attract more settlers. Thomas Causton named his plantation "Causton's Bluff" and when his mansion was completed he named it "Ockstead."

Causton entertained as much as possible and this account of an evening dinner written by his guest and neighbor William Stephens is worth relating: "After dinner...I was agreeably amused in viewing a very fine house after the modern taste, neatly furnished...and offices and out-houses in uniform manner...also a large garden and orchard laid out...eloquently." In time Causton's plantation proved to be the model for future settlers.

Thomas Causton was so respected he was made keeper of the public stores which gave him control of supplies and food. At one time, he was accused of financial irregularities but it was never proven. In 1745 Causton died while returning to America from England after pleading his case. It wasn't until 1763 that the trustees awarded Causton Bluff to Causton's heir William Williamson. The first sign of plantation life's demise at Causton Bluff was the intrusion of salt water into the fresh water of the rice fields making it brackish which killed the rice crops. Shortly after 1910 industry came knocking on plantation doors wanting rights-of-way for railroads and ship builders wanted choice property for their fast-growing business. Desperate for cash, the plantation owners gave into their requests which ultimately brought the plantation era to a close. The rest? It's history.

BARBARA HOFER



This map shows the locations of the buildings of the three plantations. Also included is the Savannah and Tybee Railroad. Causton's Bluff was an early leader in rice cultivation on the Savannah River. However, dredging of the river eventually led to brackish water entering the rice fields and destroying the crop. By 1910 there were no attempts to cultivate rice. The property is bordered downriver by Saint Augustine Creek. There are no plantations between here and the mouth of the river.