

SLAVERY AT CAUSTON BLUFF? YES AND NO

In the early years of the 18th century, 1712 to be exact, settlers to what would later be known as Causton Bluff realized right away that they had a lot of work to do. As they were mostly well-to-do Englishman, or at least members of the gentry who had received land grants from the Trustees they had pledged to build and develop communities that hopefully would attract even more settlers to the area. Without laborers this would have been virtually impossible. They were in need of more than just a few good men, they needed workers to plow, plant, pick and perform domestic chores as well.

The Georgia Trustees had made it known early on that they did not believe in the concept of slavery, but in time they permitted it under certain conditions and to make sure these 'conditions' were being met, they hired a journalist to travel about the colony and report in his journals the activities of settlers. His name was William Stephens and was known to have paid a visit to the home of Thomas Causton. That visit proved to be very complimentary. (See "The Journal of William Stephens" available for viewing in the Georgia Room at the Bull Street Live Oak Library in Savannah.)

As more and more settlers began to stream into the Savannah and the colony of Georgia so named in honor of the current King of England, King George II, a mixture of cultures began to pursue their own new way of life. Already here and thriving were the Yamacraw Indians of the Creeks with Tomochichi as their chief who in peace aided General James Oglethorpe greatly in developing the settlement.

To solve the need-for-laborers problem in the colony, General Oglethorpe initiated the process of releasing all those in English debtor's prisons with the provision that they would agree to come to Savannah with free passage and become laborers. Unfortunately most of these new arrivals did not prove to be good workers and became instead misfits, heavy drinkers, and seemingly were not interested in work of any kind.

In time, owning slaves in Georgia became a common practice, but Georgia's Trustees stood firm in their belief that it was not acceptable. Treatment of slaves at Causton Bluff was still monitored by Trustee representatives. Slave ships from Africa were known to arrive in Savannah with public sales of slaves being held frequently in the lane behind the Custom House on Bay Street. Slavery, already common practice in Europe seemingly had spread to America.

In 1852 Causton Bluff Plantation owner Robert Habersham was deeded 89 slaves formerly owned by Herman Blodgett. At Causton Bluff slaves lived in small cabins built for them on plantation property. Others chose to live in small settlements, one rather large one was located at water's edge near the ferry landing and the General Store.

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Many children were born of the slaves at Causton Bluff and the Colony Trustees made it clear that the slave owners were responsible for their food, shelter, and clothing. A list of the names of Robert Habersham's slaves is made available to us through "Archaeological Investigations at Causton's Bluff" by Lawrence E Babits, a publication that is available at the Live Oak Library on Bull Street and also at the Georgia Historical Society at Whitaker and Gaston Street and the library at Armstrong State University. (The Listing of Slaves is attached at the end of this article.)

When the Civil War began in 1861 it was only two years later that President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation which freed all slaves in America forever. Before that proclamation was enacted many Causton Bluff slaves chose to escape their captivity by means of using a creek that ran through the Bluff property and led to the Wilmington River. The escape route was so often used that it earned the name of "Runaway Negro Creek." The little creek still exists running under President Street Extension just yards from our entry gate. Today, the creek is called simply, "Runaway Creek" (see attached map).

The plight of slaves in America has left a trail of sad memories in the pages of history. But during research I came upon an article written by an English journalist for the London Times who was sent to Savannah to catch the "feeling" of the city on April 20th of 1865, months after Savannah had surrendered on Dec. 24, 1864. The London Times correspondent, William Howard Russell wrote "...streets were composed of the most odd, quaint green-windowed little houses I have ever beheld with an odd population of lean, sallow, ill-dressed, unwholesome-looking whites lounging about the exchanges and corners and a busy, well-clad, gaily-attired race of negros."

The war was over April 21, 1865. Causton Bluff slaves had been freed yet some elected to stay on as paid servants, and some elected to accept adoption and gain a last name thus becoming part of the family.

If the history books have told it like it was and the Georgia Trustees of 1712 stood fast with their beliefs as reported, Causton Bluff appears to have gone by the rules which enables us to answer the question, "Slavery at Causton Bluff? YES, we needed good laborers and NO we never believed in slavery."

Barbara Hofer

(continued – 1875 map)

(continued – Listing of slaves-1852)

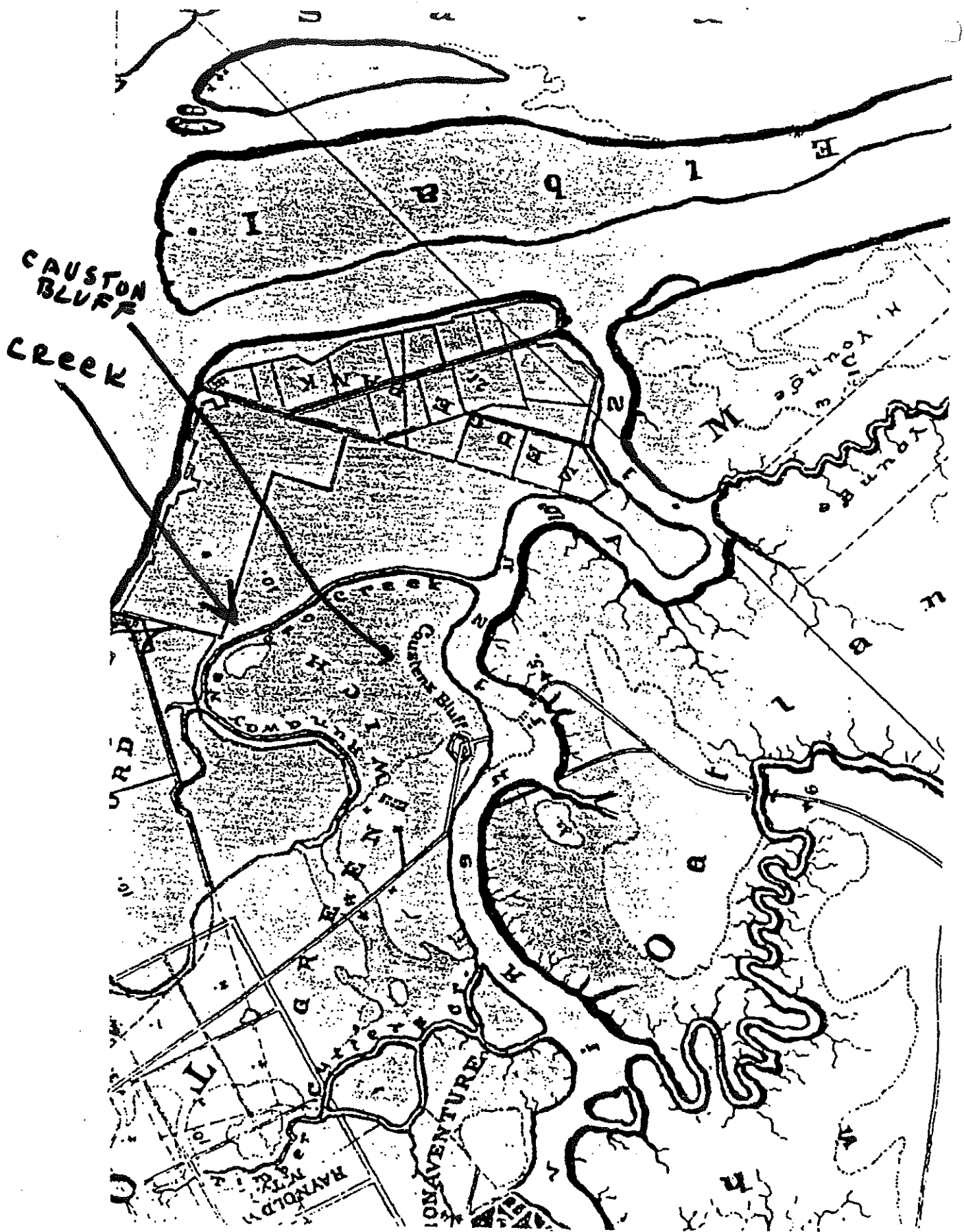


Plate 2-10

(detail, Platen, 1875)

APPENDIX Q - Listing of Slaves circa 1852

Old Doctor	Chloe	Caine
Harriet	Old Maai Jenny	Dick
Stepney	Hardtimes	Elsy
Amanda	Thomas	Balddon
Bob	Ned	Jenny
Rhoda	Webster	Washington
Pleasants	Belinda	Cyrus
Patience	Jerry	Mingo
Pender	Harriet	Old Belinda
William	Francis	Jim
William	Mira	Phebe
Jupiter	Leah	Stephen
Oscar	Diana	Maria
Affy	Dorcas	Isaiah
Clarinda	Matilda	Lamar
Maria	Adam	Hagar
Goliah	Flora	Phillils
Kate	Will	Cecelia
Joe	Sylvia	Clensey
Cornelia	Dick	Sarah
Jerry	Cecelia	Dick
Althea	Nora	Sally
John	Ballesi	John
Bay	Rose	George
Bob	Ned	Lucy
Harrington	Sue	Judy
Pussy	Morris	Mily
Hardtimes	Alec	Belly
Christina	Tom	Elsey
Brabsin	Sally	

(Chatham Country Deed Book 3-I, Folio 319, dated 1 February 1852)