

I'On in the 1970's

By William J. Hamilton, III

I grew up in Hobcaw and lived there from 1972 until I went to college in 1978. We often played and explored in the area which is now I'On.

My family's connection with this land goes back much further. My ancestor, William Finklea camped here with the 10th. SC Volunteer Infantry during the American Civil War in April 1862 and reenlisted here for the duration of the war.

The land which became I'On consisted in the 1970's of a series of rectangular farm fields and two rut roads running along Mathis Ferry Road. Two smaller fields were located in what is now Shelmore. An Oyster shell boat landing and long line of pilings running from the mouth of Shelmore Creek to in front of what is now Olde Park stood along Hobcaw Creek. There was a small dock near the boat landing. The boat landing is now in the precise location where the old one was.

In the mid 1970's an asphalt sidewalk was constructed along Mathis Ferry Road in part through the influence of State Senator Dewey Wise, who lived in Hobcaw. Prior to that sidewalk Doctor Walsh, who lived in the area, would mow a path down the shoulder with a push mower to accommodate his jogging activities.

The large lakes now in I'On were then the site of ordinary farm fields.

The most common crop grown on this land then was soybeans and the area was called the bean fields by those living nearby. One summer, watermelons were grown here. It was rumored this delectable crop was defended by a watchman with a shotgun loaded with rock salt. I never had the nerve to take a watermelon from the fields.

The long dirt roads which ran through the property were popular for bicycle riding and walking. Construction debris were sometimes dumped along them and we incorporated them into the forts we built in the woods here. Among the things we found was a section of plywood airplane wing. A burned out car was lodged in the woods near where Eastlake road connects with Mathis Ferry today.

Shelmore point was a popular place for parties and oyster roasts. A large number of empty beer cans could be found there. Rusty sheets of iron and cinderblocks to hold them up, over the fire were left there. Piles of empty oyster shells were scattered about. At night it was a moderately popular lover's lane. The County Police Department (which no longer exists) patrolled the area infrequently so these activities were largely unregulated. The roads were gated, but people came by boat, motorcycle or simply bushwacked through the woods.

Shipyard road ran along the North side of the large

fields into the woods between what is now I'On and Hobcaw. It continued on through Hobcaw as what was known as the old road North of and parallel to Bampfield until it struck Coinbow in that community. The old roadbed was scattered with oyster shells and packed solid from years of use. At the last field (Near the current location of the intersection of Eastlake and Shipyard) it turned right until it struck a gate on Mathis Ferry Road near where the Soccar Field is now, connecting somewhere near the Eastlake exit to I'On.

Shelmore Road as it was then known, ran from Shipyard to Shelmore Point on the approximate track of what is Now Ponsbury and Saturday Road.

The I'On Graveyard stood in the woods. The monument had been struck by a falling tree and turned, but was still upright. The remnants of an iron fence surrounded the monument.

On one occasion, My family drove on to the land to find a small pine to cut for an outdoor Christmas tree. We found a tree, about nine feet tall, well formed for the purpose in the vicinity of what is now the soccer field. Not all of the fields were still being actively farmed. In some summers, the fields stood fallow, growing large crops of cow fennel. Some winters a cover crop to protect the ground was planted, which was disked under come spring.

Other fields were farmed in the vicinity, including some on what is now Johnnie Dodds Blvd. and between Johnnie Dodds and Mathis Ferry Road.

In Spring of 1976 my Boy Scout Troop, Troop 11 of the Hobcaw Yacht Club, set up an area to fire our Estes Rockets on a clear afternoon in late winter. We positioned ourselves in the SE Corner of the first large field, near where Maybank Field is now. Dozens of launches were conducted that afternoon. A small orange rocket I constructed reached an altitude of 385 feet as measured by our homemade theo-



dite, which used a fishing weight and plastic protractor to measure the angle. We filled the parachute chamber with a charge of chalk to make a spot we could see when



Boy Scout Rocket Launch in I'On Area, 1976. The intersection of Sowell & Shelmore would be in the left background.

the parachute was ejected. During the afternoon the wind increased and several rockets were lost in the trees.

The fields were a popular hunting ground. Children enjoyed gathering the spent shotgun shells which were scattered along the roads. 20 gage and 410 cartridges were most common, indicating that most of the hunting was for birds.

We occasionally encountered people riding horses there. Hoof marks along the roads were common. The animal tracks of deer, raccoons and dogs were found along the roads after they had been wetted by the rain.

We built two campsites in the area. One was located in the vicinity of the Indian mounds on the first point, North of the Graveyard. We spent several days clearing the land, building a hut and putting a lookout in the tree, but our parents never allowed us to camp there. We buried a stock of Vienna sausages and spam that I don't recall ever recovering.

We built another camp on the point in Olde Park where the Rice House now is. Back in the woods about 400 feet from the Marsh were the ruins of a cabin, including a brick chimney and a small brick cistern. We built a small dock under the tree which hangs out over the marsh to facilitate our visits by boat. Our parents never let us camp there either.

It was a vast, beautiful place to explore as a boy. One never approached it without an expanding sense of adventure. The graveyard, old cabin site and long roads gave mystery and import to the ground. I

continued to visit the area until I graduated from High School, enjoying occasional walks. The land changed little in those six years.

Agriculture was then fading from this part of Mt. Pleasant. The frontage roads along Johnnie Dodds (Then called the Bypass) were dirt for long sections. Mt. Pleasant was still a quiet place. It was a wonderful place to grow up. People generally had far less money and much of the stress and ostentation which one sees today was unknown. The State Ports Authority Terminal was in permitting and the subject of great controversy. 526 was a line on a CHATS map. Daniel Island was a cow farm.

But for visionary planning, the beautiful land that became I'On would have been swallowed up by ordinary suburban sprawl, cul du sacs inhabited by strangers. Thanks to the care with which I'On was laid out and constructed, streets run along the paths of the old roads, the great trees familiar to me from childhood endure, a lawn and boatlanding stand at Shelmore point which now accommodates somewhat more formal parties. I can walk along the marsh as I once did through a landscape transformed, but not obliterated.

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