

OLD SPANISH FORT  
AND OLD BLAKELEY

SPANISH FORT AND OLD BLAKELEY

By: C. L. Johnson  
July 20, 1935

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REPORT OF  
PRELIMINARY HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION  
OF OLD SPANISH FORT AND OLD BLAKELEY  
IN BALDWIN COUNTY, ALABAMA

by

C. L. JOHNSON  
ASSISTANT REGIONAL HISTORIAN  
REGION FOUR

July 20, 1935.

## I LOCATION

Old Spanish Fort is located in Baldwin County, Alabama just north of U. S. Highway No. 90 and is easily reached. Old Blakeley is hard to reach over a very poor road from U. S. Highway No. 31. This road is about three miles long and does not go all the way to the site. (See maps and sketches enclosed).

## II HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE SITE

Enclosed is a letter from Mr. Peter A. Brannon, Curator of the Department of Archives and History of the State of Alabama. His letter expresses the opinion that "the Old Spanish Fort area is ..... the most historic in the Southern country." There is much history connected with this area from about 1558 until after the Civil War. From Mr. Brannon's letter it is seen that there are many sources of material on the area and that much research would be involved in order to give the region justice. The Civil War engagements here are not the only important historical incidents, and the early history is interesting and typical of the development of the region. Dr. A. B. Moore, Dean of the Graduate School, University, Alabama has promised to assign valuable subjects to graduate students and give the National Park Service the benefit of their researches. It might be possible to get this area so handled. It might also be possible if a camp were located here to include the position of historical foreman in the personnel and have him exhaust the area to the extent of his ability and time.

Unless requested to do so I shall not attempt to get into the sources and prepare a historical sketch of the region, although time permitting, I would welcome the opportunity. I am convinced of its historic value and association with the early history around Mobile Bay and South Alabama.

Following is an account of the history of Old Blakeley by Mr. Brannon:

THE MONTGOMERY ADVERTISER

February 24, - - - 1 9 3 5

THROUGH THE YEARS

Old Blakeley

By: Peter A. Brannon

- - - - -

The Legislative Council and House of Representatives of the Mississippi Territory, by an Act passed on January 6, 1814, created the town of Blakeley. This picturesque old spot in the Tensaw Country has never had more than passing comment by writers and I have long had a desire to compile some early records concerning it, so here goes:

The first section of the act authorizes Josiah Blakeley to lay off a town on his land on the east side of Mobile Bay. The second section of the act resolves that "it shall be lawful for the said Josiah Blakeley to adopt the plat he already had as the plan of said town," and directs that he record it in the clerk's office of the County Court of Mobile County within three months.

The legislature of the State of Alabama, by an Act of December 4, 1820, provided for the "government of the town of Blakeley." On December 20, they provided for the "government of the Port and Harbor of Blakeley." In the December 4 act the corporation is "perpetually constituted." The date of the town election was fixed for the first Monday in December each year when five commissioners, a treasurer, an accessor and a collector of taxes was to be elected by a ballot of all the free white male inhabitants who had resided there as long as twelve months. The limits and boundaries of the town were fixed to continue as they were already defined by the plan recorded under the act of 1814. The corporation was empowered to lay out streets and alleys and to accept donations in addition to those "already granted by the late Josiah Blakeley."

JOSIAH BLAKELEY

The New Englander for whom the town was called -- or rather who originally called it for his own family, was from Connecticut.

He took his oath of allegiance to the Spanish Crown on July 10, 1810. According to that, which, by the way, is filed in the Mobile County archives, he came to Spanish West Florida in 1806, and in 1807 bought an island on the east side of the upper bay from Don Jose Collins. He left Connecticut in 1800 and lived six years in Santiago, Cuba. From a letter recorded in Mobile County Records, Miscellaneous Book E, you may learn much of his island plantation, and incidentally of Mobile. Mr. Blakeley was a justice of the quorum of Mobile County and presided at the meeting on March 11, 1814, when the election of commissioners of American Mobile town was determined upon. He never lived in his own town. He died in February 1815.

There is even yet some contention as to how to spell his name. The Spanish records (originals) and his own signature is "Blakeley", so thusly I will spell it.

#### THE TOWN PLAN

In May, 1813, Mr. Blakeley employed James Magoffin, the surveyor so long associated with Saint Stephens line, to lay off and plat his property between Mobile and Tensas Rivers. The seat of the city-to-be was chosen as the townsite of the Apalache Indians of Bienville's days, the point where Bayou Solime (Solome) enters the Tensas of today. It was on the White House Plantation of Dr. Joseph Chastang, which he, Mr. Blakeley, after American occupation, was cautious enough to have legalized by a release from the Chastang heirs.

In July, 1813, Warren Ross Dodge bought the first ten lots sold, paying therefor \$1,000. The platted ground extended one and one-half miles back from the Tensas River front. The lots were 99 by 199 feet. Among the streets were: Washington, Orleans, Robinson, Franklin, Warren, Greene, Wayne, Clinton, Baldwin, Hancock, Shelby, Clarke and Blount. At least one of them, the main one leading to the dock, was known as an "avenue." Alas! Washington Avenue today totally deserted, owl-infested, moss-hung and desolate, is the sole evidence of these once reminders of revolutionary and early American patriots.

In September, 1817, The New York Herald carried as a letter from S. Haines, an informative story entitled: "Towns in the Alabama Territory." The Huntsville (Alabama Territory) Republican re-published the article on October 7, following, and two weeks later had an editorial: "Internal Improvement," and either of these would do credit to a modern chamber of commerce "boost" effort.

The reference to Blakeley is:

"Whether the town of Mobile is to become the great commercial city, which appears to be about rising up at the outlet of the extensive and interesting waters of Tombigbee and Alabama, or some other place, time will soon determine. However respectable the town of Mobile has become to its great AGE, the Americans who are emigrating to that country seem generally to turn their attention to a new town laid out, in pursuance of an act the Territory Legislature on the east channel of Mobile River.

"This is styled in the law of "Town of Blakeley" - it lies six miles north of Mobile Bay on the east margin of the main direct ship channel of Mobile River; which from near Fort Stoddart down to the bay, is dominated "Tensa" - this channel subdivides in front of Blakeley, and its principal mouth runs southwestwardly to near the center of the head of the bay, where it forms a junction with Spanish River, (which is the main channel into Mobile) and both make one common channel over the bar, 12 feet deep at high water; there being but two feet flow of tide ordinary; and but one flood and one ebb in 24 hours in Mobile Bay. The other four mouths of Mobile River have not more than eight or nine feet at high water on their bars -- vessels drawing more than eight feet of water must pass up Spanish River (which is the third mouth from the high land) and double an island six miles north of Mobile, and then with a northerly wind, drop down to town, vessels of the same draw pass directly from the sea into the port of Blakeley, without the least delay. The harbor of Blakeley is spacious, convenient, and secure, having bold shores on all sides and entirely land locked close in.

The high lands on which the town stands, shield the shipping entirely of easterly and southerly gates, (the only dangerous winds in Mobile Bay).

"The Town of Blakeley is regularly laid out, with streets 99 feet wide running at right angles, east and west, north and south. It is situated upon two general branches of land; the one in front on the river (3,000 feet from the margin) is 26 feet in height above tide water; then about one quarter of a mile back the ground rises gradually for half a mile, till it gains an elevation above the level of the sea of 100 feet -- a beautiful plane - into a ridge of 250 feet above high water mark.

"No town in the United States is better supplied with fresh water than Blakeley. A great multitude of never failing copious springs of the purest water issue from the high table of land within the plat of the town, as well as from the high ridge in its rear. So that however extensive the town may, by means of aqueducts, be accomodated with plenty of the best water -- such a privilege is rarely to be realized in seaports, especially in so warm a climate as that on the coast of Florida.

"The numerous groves of majestic live oaks, interspersed over the site of Blakeley, will, judicious reservations of such as fall within the streets, not only become a great ornament to the town, but be a source of much comfort to the inhabitants during the influence of an almost vertical sun,

"This promising town is rapidly improving. Some of the principal merchants at Mobile and also several mercantile gentlemen from New York, Boston, New Orleans and elsewhere, have recently purchased lots of the original proprietors, and are now erecting suitable warehouses and dwelling houses in Blakeley, preparatory to extensive business there in the Fall."

"There is at present a great competition between the proprietors of Blakeley and Mobile."

"Which town is to take the lead in trade is at present unknown. It will depend much upon the force of capital, and the description of people, who are not yet settled in either town. For the capital there now is very inconsiderable, and the population small."

This Samuel Haines who seems to have written to Charles C. Haines, Esq., (possibly a relative) was Mr. Blakeley's attorney and he, it was, who wafered the town plat into the Mobile Deed Book "A". When the County of Baldwin was given this eastern shore section, in 1822, they took this out to set it into the Baldwin Records. Courthouse fights and fires have played havoc with these records and now the original is no more. Mr. Haines was deeded several lots in the old town prior to Mr. Blakeley's death and years later he still had property there.

#### EARLY STEAMBOATS

As early as 1819, Brown and Bell were building boats at Blakeley. They built the "Mississippi" of four hundred tons, and the "Tensas," of sixty tons. The latter which had a long active career on the river, was built for the "Steamboat Company of Alabama," a corporation of 1820, composed of Francis B. Stockton, Francis W. Armstrong, James L. Seabury, Nicholas Poper, and Jonathan Woodward, and the "town of Blakeley" was designated by the act as a principal place of business. This boat, sometimes "The Tensaw" was perhaps the second boat to ascend the Alabama River. She reached Montgomery in August, 1822. According to John Hardy's History of Selma, she was a "belching craft". Unlike the first steamers on the Alabama River, the Tensaw was a stern-wheel boat and the pilot guided with a lever. There was no hurricane deck. Like most of the early boats she changed hands several times during her career. A Mobile advertisement of 1821, signed by J. L. Seabury, President of the Steamboat Company of Alabama puts the boat up for auction.

Gabriel F. Mott began the publication of a semi-weekly paper, which he called the "Blakeley Sun," at that place in December, 1818. The Alabama Republican of January 9, 1819, says: "We have the first number of the Blakeley Sun, a semi-weekly paper printed in this territory. The Sun is printed on good paper of the super-royal size and is well executed -- it makes the fourth now published in Alabama; two more are shortly to be established, one at the Falls of Tuskaloosa and one at Fort Clairborne. A clipping from one of the first issues (the date is in the second week of February, 1819) is:

"What a wonderful country is ours! How like enchantment towns and villages rise up! Blakeley eighteen months ago, was a wilderness of impenetrable woods, and inhabited by the ruthless savage -- but now by the hardy and undaunted American American, nothing is now seen or heard but the din of business, and the stroke of the axe resounding through the distant woods -- buildings raising their heads in almost every quarter of the town, and the constant arrival and departure of vessels, present a scene both interesting and beautiful to the contemplative mind and the man of business."

"We find no hesitation in saying that Blakeley will before many years, be the chief seaport town in the Alabama Territory, it being the easiest of access from the sea of any other; vessels drawing from ten to twelve feet of water can get over Dog River bar (which runs from one side of Mobile Bay to the other), and the same wind that brings them over the bar will bring them up the Tensaw to Blakeley."

"We would recommend to the notice of the merchants of Blakeley to have the channel staked out from the bar to the mouth of the Tensaw, which would make it easier for the mariner, the expense will be so trifling, and the object so important, that we hope it may speedily be done."

#### LATER DAYS

That same Mr. Stockton, who was an incorporator of the steamboat company and an early property-owner in Blakeley, has left his name in Stockton town, once a contender for the county-seat.

Blakeley was fixed as the county-seat of Baldwin County in December, 1820, and here the courthouse stood until 1870, though by the Act of August 11, 1868, the county commissioners were directed to choose a new site.

As a courthouse site, the town succeeded the historic McIntosh Bluff. Health experts have never favored the site as one suitable for a great city. Twice in its eventful life the town was all but

wiped out. The musquito is blamed for most of its vicissitudes.

The engagement at Spanish Fort and Blakeley just prior to the downfall of the Confederacy, form an interesting association with the history of the conflict between the two nations. General Steele's 16,000 Federal troops engaged a scattered 3,500 Confederates here at Blakeley in April, 1865, and on the 9th, just as Lee laid down his arms at Appomattox, these fresh blue hordes swept away the thin lines of gray boys and old men. Two days later batteries Huger and Tracy, who were reinforced by the Confederate gunboats, Nashville, Huntsville and Morgan, gave way and the Confederacy's last effort in the West was a failure.

With the removal of the courthouse, Blakeley, if I may quote an old expression, "went on the decline." Today nothing save the cemetery marks Josiah Blakeley's "dream." A beautiful, as well as handsome, specimen of liveoak there on old Washington Avenue is said to be the largest in the world. God's gift is still blooming and growing greater, man's contributions have entirely vanished. Even the granite gravestones are crumbling.

Following is an excerpt from Alabama, Her History Resources, War Record and Public Men, W. Brewer, Barrett and Brown, Montgomery, Alabama 1782 Chapter XIII, 119 et seq.

Following the fall of Fort Morgan and Gaines:

Major General Canby landed at Fort Morgan with 32,000 effective troops, March 17, - this formidable force moved up the eastern shore of the bay to attack the Confederate defenses opposite Mobile. On the 27th, after skirmishing with the Confederate Cavalry on the route, they formally invested Spanish Fort. This was the name given to the work on Conway River, an arm of the Tensa, in this county, seven miles due east of Mobile City. Around the two forts, Old Spanish and McDermott, was a semi-circular line of earthworks, nearly two miles in length, resting on the water,

or rather on the morass, at either end. The garrison at the beginning of the siege, and for five days thereafter, consisted of about 3,400 men, comprising Gibson's brigade of Louisiana. Ector's brigade (two regiments) of North Carolinians and Texans, and Thomas' brigade of Alabama reserves. The latter were relieved, April 1, by Holtzclars brigade of Alabamians, who came by water from Blakeley, and the garrison thus constituted, numbered 2, 321 infantry, and 506 artillery; the whole under Brig. Gen. Randall L. Gibson. Spanish Fort had been constructed to protect batteries Huger and Tracy, respectively, one and a half and two miles in the rear on the low islands. They had been placed there to obstruct the ascent of the river. The day after the investment by land, a number of iron clad steamers moved up the river in rear of the defenses, but their operations were chiefly confined to shelling Huger and Tracy. During the siege three of them were sunk by torpedoes -- the Milwaukee, the Osage, and the Dodolph. Till the evening of the last day, the operations on shore were confined to artillery firing and sharp-shooting, enlivened by several petty dashes in the nature of a sortie. The two former were almost incessant, and taxed the courage and endurance of the garrison to the full limit. April 4, a terrific bombardment, from seventy pieces of artillery, lasted for two hours, and the earth seemed to reel under the sound; but the garrison did not reply. By the last day of the siege the assailants had ninety guns trained on the devoted fort -- fifty three of which were siege guns and thirty seven were field pieces. Throughout the night the huge missiles of death traversed the air with fiery wings, poised a moment over the silent defenses, then swooped upon their human quarry with angry and stunning roar. Day by day, too, the besieges crept close to their prey, as parallel after parallel was opened; and the crack shot of the small arms grew nearer and deadlier. At sunset, on the evening of the 8th, an assault was made on the left of the Confederate line, and after a fierce grapple with Ector's veterans, overpowered them and effected a lodgment within the works. They were too strong to be driven on though the attempt was made.

The Confederates evacuated the works the same night,

by passing over a plank foot-bridge, two feet in width, and about two miles in length, which had been laid over the marshes from the fort to the river opposite battery Tracy. Here they found transportation deficient, and at midnight about 1000 took up the line of march over the morass to Blakeley. The distance was five miles, and the men were often waist deep in mud and water; but they arrived safely at their point of destination, and the whole garrison that left the fort reached Mobile in safety. A number were captured in the assault, and others were left by accident. Such a brief, is the story of Spanish Fort, and its heroic defense for thirteen days.

While the main body was thus engaged, a column of 13,200 men under Major General F. Steele, moved out to Pensacola, March 20, and took the road to Pollard. After some skirmishing and especially a spirited affair with two regiments of Alabama Cavalry at Bluff Springs, the advance guard reached Pollard on the 26th, after burning the public property and tearing up the railroad track for 1000 yards. Steele turned the head of his column towards Blakeley. The fortifications of this place were an irregular line of works, stretching along the river for three miles, and with the ends resting on the morass near the river. Nine well built lunettes added much strength, and two or three lines of abatis were some distance in front. The garrison consisted of two skeleton brigades of Missourians, and Mississippians under Gates and Harry, both commanded by Gen. Cockrell, and a brigade of Alabama reserves under General Thomas; making a total of about 3500 men; the whole under Brig. Gen. St. John R. Liddell. The column of Gen. Steele arrived before the place April 1, and the investment was complete the following day. Reinforced by two divisions of Canby's immediate force before Spanish Fort, the assailants now numbered about 25,000 effective men -- one division of whom were negroes. But their supply of artillery was limited till towards the close of the operations. An active and unremittent musketry fire, however, replied to the fierce commanding of the garrison, and of the three gunboats -- the Nashville, Huntsville, and Morgan -- lying in the river. The besiegers exhibited striking activity in advancing their trenches and the labors of every night invariably brought them within shorter range for the duties of the succeeding day.

The garrison was equally spirited, and two or three gallant sorties were made, while their incessant volleys were unusually effectual. The operations progressed more rapidly than those at Spanish Fort, and on the evening of the 9th, the whole Federal force swept forward in one dense but extended mass to the assault of the works. Fully 16,000 men, in line of battle, three miles in length, moved like a blue billow over the level ground, and dashed resistlessly over the frail defenses. They were met by a leaden hail from men whose hearts quailed not even in an hour so fearful. But further resistance was futile, and the heroic garrison was captured, as their comrades at Appomattox had been a few hours before, by overwhelming numbers.

Batteries Huger and Tracy were evacuated April 11, and the purple tide of war ebbed from the shores of Baldwin.

The loss of the Federal forces in the reduction of these defenses was fifteen hundred men killed and wounded. The loss of the Confederate was about four hundred killed and wounded, and about four thousand prisoners.

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With the exception of remains connected with the Civil War there are few historic remains. The Atlas to accompany The War of the Rebellion, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Volume 1, Plate 61, Cut 6 shows a sketch of the Siege of Blakeley, Alabama, Invested April 2, 1865, by Federal forces under Major General F. Steele. The assault was made April 9, 1865. It was taken on the same day as Appomattox. Volume 1, Plate 71, Cut 14, shows the Rebel line of Works at Blakeley, Alabama. Volume 1, Plate 71, Cut 13, shows The Defenses of the City of Mobile and shows defenses of Blakeley and all Spanish Fort. Volume 1, Plate 79, Cut 7, shows Siege Operations at Spanish Fort and Mobile Bay. Volume 2, Plate 90, Cuts 10 and 11 show Plan of Battlefield of Spanish Fort. Volume 2, Plate 91, Cut 5, Sketch of Spanish Fort. Volume 2, Plate 110, shows area around Mobile Bay and Eastward. The Official Records, Series I, XLIX gives the action in this area.

As the maps and records show there were a large number of earthworks on the area. It is estimated that there are approximately 35 miles of these earthworks and on few battlefields are they as numerous. They are mostly well preserved and undisturbed. Spanish Fort, which dates back perhaps to 1558 was remodeled by the Confederate forces and is in poor condition, largely due to erosion. Pictures of Spanish Fort and the outlying trenches are enclosed.

Of Old Blakeley nothing remains except the cemetery. Some of the most beautiful trees to be found in the South are found on the old town site (See pictures enclosed).

#### IV THE SCENIC QUALITIES OF THE AREA

This area contains some of the highest ridges along the gulf coast, they are quite steep and well wooded. Many streams and springs add to the beauty of the region. Some of the pictures enclosed will demonstrate the native beauty. It is really a superlative area.

#### V TYPE OF LABOR REQUIRED

ECW or relief labor would be satisfactory for the development of the area.

#### VI HISTORICAL WORK DONE LOCALLY

There has been no work done locally but there have been many articles written on the area by people such as Mr. Brannon. The Official Records and maps found in the Atlas would be invaluable on the Civil War period. The Department of Archives at Montgomery, Alabama, Jackson, Mississippi, Tallahassee, Florida and Baton Rouge, Louisiana should be fruitful sources for material on the region, as Mr. Brannon says there is a wealth of material on the area.

#### VIII ARCHAEOLOGICAL POSSIBILITIES

There are none known at present, but Dr. Jones, State Geologist for Alabama and others have worked in this region and can advise as to the possibilities.

This region was early occupied by Indians and some remains of their civilization should be present.

VIII MUSEUM POSSIBILITIES

A Civil War Museum might be possible as work done on this area should unearth many relics of the siege which took place there.

IX VALUE OF THE REGION

From a historic view, a conservation (of wildlife and forests) view and a recreational view the area is desirable. If the area (8000) acres proposed by Inspector Rushton is acquired, it will be one of the most outstanding parks in the south.

X CONCLUSIONS

Because of its location, accessibility to large numbers of people, its natural beauty and scenic qualities, its recreational possibilities and its historic value, I recommend that this area be acquired and developed as a National Park.

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COPY

August 1, 1935

Mr. Peter A. Brannon, Curator,  
Department of Archives and History,  
State Capitol  
Montgomery, Alabama

My dear Sir:

The Montgomery Advertiser of February 24,  
carried an article under your name called Through The  
years, Old Blakeley.

Would it be possible for you to supply us  
with additional information about the Old Blakeley and  
and Old Spanish Fort Area? The following facts are es-  
pecially desired:

- (1) Date and early history of Old Spanish Fort
- (2) Civil War history of Old Spanish Fort
- (3) Civil War importance of Old Blakeley.

Thanking you for your cooperation.

Yours very truly,

J. H. GADSBY  
Regional Officer.

By \_\_\_\_\_  
C. L. Johnson,  
Assistant Regional Historian

CLJ:pc  
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C O P Y

STATE OF ALABAMA  
Department of Archives and History  
Montgomery

In reply refer to File No. A-973

August 5, 1935

My dear Mr. Johnson:

Referring to your letter of August 1, I wonder if you have available to you the War of Rebellion Records, O. W. R. series, wherein you will find considerable material referable to the campaign of General Canby in the fall of 1864 and the spring of 1865, prior to the Capitulation of Spanish Fort. You should also see Hamilton's Colonial Mobile, a volume wherein is much of value. Obviously, the volume on Colonial Mobile will give you no Civil War History, but therein are casual references to Old Spanish Fort. The importance of Old Spanish Fort site in the War between the States is fully brought out in a number of Confederate histories, as well as, in the O. W. R. series.

Referring to your question number one, I fear you are taxing me with a rather large problem. I have written perhaps a half-dozen stories on the subject of Old Blakeley and perhaps as many on Spanish Fort, but they are in the main, of a character which gets into a very interesting phase of early American history. If you have access to the De Luna narrative, the recent translation of the Florida State Historical Society, you will find therein much of interesting reference material, in so far as the probability of this settlement site being the one referred to as the original Spanish attempt at colonization in North America above Mexico. Certain students at the present day are rather disposed to think that Spanish Fort is actually the Fort or site on which the Spaniards settled about 1558--when the De Luna Expedition reached the Gulf Coast. Of course, many patriotic Floridians are disposed to think that the settlement was at Pensacola. With this I disagree. It cannot be proven that the De Luna colony's original effort was other than on the East shore of Mobile Bay. I am rather disposed to agree with Mr. J. Y. Brame of the Alabama Anthropological Society, who thinks that it is not at all unlikely that this Spanish Fort of that day and the Spanish Fort of later days, is one and the same site. At least, it is not unlikely that one perpetuates the other, not necessarily immediately on the same site.

I think you will get additional data by making a study of the De Narvaez narrative, the De Soto narratives, and other Spanish expeditions to the Gulf Coast. The De Narvaez and De Soto antedated De Luna's coming, but in the recent Spanish translations there have been annotations which are rather helpful in any study of this kind.

I have never made an effort to develop the 1864-5 history of the fortifications erected by the Federal Government at old Spanish Fort. While the campaign seems to have been one to which the Federal attached considerable significance, I do not agree that

it could have been of that much importance. The power of the Federal Army was concentrated there in Western Baldwin County, wherein only a few Regulars and not many more Home Guards and Reserve troops of the Confederacy, were available to make the defence. Your study of the subject will demonstrate that there could not have possibly been any determined stand on the part of the Confederate troops. All that might be said in this connection is that the Confederate troops were acquainted with the locality, which is in itself somewhat of a problem. This low swampy country was not conducive to promote a military campaign particularly to the enemy who did not know the situation.

In so far as the Old Spanish Fort Area is concerned, it is to my mind the most historic in the Southern Country. You should remember that almost in a stone's throw, old Fort Mims, Fort Montgomery, old Montpelier, and the original French Eastern shore settlements at Montrose and Boyou Minette (Bay Minette of today), and this Tensas country of East Alabama, was the rendezvous point of many Loyalists and Torys in Revolutionary days, as well as, many Georgians and Carolinians who came around 1800. The Area has a very historical significance. You should see my Lilies, Lions, and Bagpipes, wherein are two stories that deal with this section. In previous years I have written on the Old Spanish Trail, The Lone Star Routes, and many times, about Old Claiborne and its vicinities. All of these bear references to this Lower Alabama River section. You will find quite much on the Area in my stories of Alexander Mc Gillivray and the Tates, and you should see Campbell's Colonial Florida. See also Whitaker's Spanish American Frontier, the Mississippi Question, Crane's "Southern Frontier", and Pickett's History of Alabama. If you really want to do some research work, you have a dandy opportunity. The field is most prolific in references.

Very truly,

Peter A. Brannon.

Mr. C. L. Johnson,  
Fourth Regional Office,  
309 Glenn Building,  
Atlanta, Georgia

P. S. I wrote to Mr. Gadsby two days ago in respect to a letter to Colonel Bunker, referred to me and one to Mrs. Owen, with reference to bulletins concerning historical points in this Area. I have written in the past five years possibly a thousand historical stories referable to historical points in this Area. I cannot by any means even suggest where you might get all these. Some of them occur in the reprints of my stories which I gather together from time to time, but which are not available except perhaps in the Library of Congress.

H. File

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
REGION ONE  
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

April 2, 1941.

Memorandum for the Regional Director, Region I:

In accordance with Associate Director Demaray's memorandum of November 22, 1940, in company with Clarence L. Johnson, Senior Foreman (Historian), Alabama SP-6, I visited and examined the so-called Old Spanish Fort Area on Mobile Bay on March 18, and, as a result, make the following observations:

1. That the proposed area is not of sufficient significance or of such unique character to warrant its being included in the National Park system as a separate historical park, monument, or site.
2. That, however, the area should be considered by the National Park Service in any Gulf Coast Regional plan of development as a control point because of its central location.
3. That the area is of sufficient interest and significance to be established as a State Park regardless of the possibility that it may fit into some future National plan for regional park development.

Location

The so-called Spanish Fort is situated on the east side of Mobile Bay, about seven miles from the city of Mobile (via the Mobile River tunnel). It is adjacent to the intersection of two main highways, U. S. 90 and U. S. 31. The latter highway begins at Mackinaw City, Michigan, and runs southward through South Bend, picks up Chicago traffic at Indianapolis, and proceeds through Louisville, Nashville, Birmingham, Montgomery, to Mobile. U. S. 90 is the principal east-west highway from Jacksonville, Florida, to New Orleans, Houston, San Antonio, and El Paso. The intersection of these two highways is at approximately the mid-point of the interesting section of the Gulf Coast between Apalachicola and New Orleans. A scenic or historical parkway development along the coast between Apalachicola and New Orleans will be compelled to detour around Mobile Bay and make use of the Cochrane Bridge causeway into Mobile. Thus the area under consideration would be on the parkway route at the junction of two main continental arteries of traffic.

### Description

The Spanish Fort is an irregular two bastioned earthwork following the contour of a high promontory on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay and encloses an area of about one-half acre. It formed an important unit in the secondary Confederate defenses of the city of Mobile. These defenses, after the Battle of Mobile Bay and the fall of Fort Morgan and Fort Gaines, became the main protection of Mobile. The Spanish Fort was designed to command the ship channel from Mobile Bay to Mobile.

About half a mile in the rear of the Spanish Fort is a strong crescent shaped line of fortifications constructed by the Confederates. This line consists of a ditch and a parapet extending from the marshes of Bay Minette southward through broken country to Red Fort, a series of strong gun emplacements on the crest of a ridge, and thence southwestward through a swamp to Fort McDermott, an irregular earth fort in a strong position on a bay shore promontory about 1200 yards south of Spanish Fort.

These Confederate works are in excellent state of preservation.

In an outer crescent completely surrounding the Confederate works on the landward or eastern side are the remains of Federal siege works, consisting of trenches, rifle pits, and numerous lunettes for siege artillery.

An excellent and accurate plan of both Confederate and Federal works is to be found in the office of the Chief of Engineers, U. S. Army, Washington, D. C., Drawer 125, Sheet 116, under the title: "Siege operations at Spanish Fort, Mobile Bay, by the U. S. forces under Maj-Gen. Canby, Captured April 8th and 9th, 1865."

The total area enclosed by the Federal siege works, including the Confederate fortifications, is probably about 2,500 acres. The bulk of this area, probably 2,000 acres, lies north and west of U. S. 90 and U. S. 31; the balance lies to the south and east of U. S. 31 and is bisected by U. S. 90.

During the period of the war Between the States the region lying between the Confederate and Federal fortifications was probably completely stripped of its forest cover. Subsequent tree growth in this area has been timbered within the past 15 years, and the present cover is largely made up of from 10 to 15 year old pine saplings intermixed in the lower portions of the land with a sprinkling of hardwoods. At its highest point the land is said to rise about 300 feet above sea level and from the bluff-like promontories along the shore and from the higher hills there are splendid views of Mobile Bay.

### Significance

The Spanish Fort derives its name from a small fort said to have been constructed on the site by the Spanish in 1779 and occupied by them

until 1781. The site is an ideal vantage point for command of the old Mobile ship channel. There is today, however, no visible evidence of the Spanish fort, and it is possible that the Confederate fort completely covers it. This question could be answered, no doubt, by archeological investigation of the site.

The brief history of the first Spanish fort is told by Miss Elizabeth C. Morison, Junior Historian, in a report on "Spanish Fort, Fort Morgan, Fort Gaines, Mobile Bay, Alabama," dated February 18, 1936. (Miss Morison's authority for this section of her report is "A Brief History of Baldwin County" by L. J. Newcomb Cummings and Martha M. Albers, Fairhope, Alabama, March, 1928. This county history is not documented.) The erection and occupation of a small fortification by the Spanish on Mobile Bay was an event of no great significance or lasting importance.

The principal historical interest in this area is the siege and defense of Mobile in the War Between the States as illustrated by the excellently preserved earthwork fortifications. Mobile was one of the last Confederate ports used by blockade runners and was not captured until April 12, 1865, after the fall of Spanish Fort. The successful defense of Mobile for 8 months after the Battle of Mobile Bay had slight, if any, direct influence on the outcome of the war, and the final siege and capture of Spanish Fort, while an interesting chapter in the military history of the United States, is of no great national significance. Furthermore, the National Park Service already has areas illustrating three outstanding military sieges, Yorktown, Petersburg and Richmond, and Vicksburg.

Spanish Fort, together with the adjacent Confederate and Federal earthworks, as physical surviving evidence of the interesting and important role Alabama and the Gulf Coast played in the War Between the States, might well be preserved by the State of Alabama, as a State Historical Park. On the other hand, however, if the National Park Service should develop a general historical program in the vicinity of Mobile Bay and should acquire Fort Morgan, Fort Gaines, and Dauphine Island, then the Spanish Fort should be considered for inclusion in this greater area. Further, if an historical and scenic parkway should be projected along the Gulf Coast, the Spanish Fort, because of its location, would be useful as a control point, and the military remains should be developed and exhibited as a part of the broad interpretation of the history of the region traversed by the parkway.

#### Relationship to Other Areas

Mobile and Mobile Bay has had an interesting and important history in which the Spanish, French, British, and Americans have shared. If the Spanish Fort area were used as a control point for a park or parkway system extending along the Gulf Coast, the historic background of

the whole region might be treated here in a general historical museum. If, however, the Spanish Fort were to be developed as a separate park, there would be little justification in treating more than the story of the War Between the States, as any other significance of this immediate area is slight. Spanish Fort fits into the general story of the Confederate defense of the Gulf Coast. Other sites are: Port St. Marks, St. Marks, Florida; Forts Barancas and Pickens, Pensacola, Florida; Fort Morgan, Mobile Point, Alabama; Fort Gaines, Dauphin Island, Alabama; Fort Massachusetts, Ship Island, Mississippi; Fort Pike, Fort Macomb, Fort Jackson, Fort St. Philip, and Fort Livingston, Louisiana.

There are in the Spanish Fort area several large Indian shell mounds, described as being from 100 to 200 feet in diameter. What significance these mounds might have and whether they are associated with village sites, I cannot say. I learned of their existence after I had inspected the area. They are probably related to similar shell mounds on Dauphin Island.

#### Ownership

The Spanish Fort, together with the adjacent Confederate and Federal fortifications, are said to lie wholly within a 2,600 acre tract which is owned by the Estate of Rufus Dawes of Chicago. The land is mortgaged to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. There are at least three small inholdings.

The first inholding, about 4 or 5 acres, is located immediately south of U. S. 90 and extends from the intersection of U. S. 90 and U. S. 31 west to the shore of Mobile Bay. One important battery and a portion of the Federal siege line is located on this property. The owner, Mr. George E. Fuller, who claims to be the local representative of the Dawes Estate, has developed here extensive tourist accommodations, known as "The Old Spanish Fort Tourist Village." This development seems to be well operated, but it would not be given a Class A rating. It consists of a restaurant, recreation room, souvenir stand, gasoline station, and cabins.

The second inholding is a 5-acre tract located on the top of a high knoll in the north-central portion of the Dawes tract. It is owned by the American National Bank of Mobile. Here is located the ruins of a club house, destroyed by fire several years ago, a relic of an unsuccessful real estate promotional scheme in which the Dawes interests were at one time engaged. Near the club house is a 100,000 gallon water tank, which was constructed to serve the club house and golf course and other proposed Dawes improvements. Several fairways, now overgrown with pine saplings, can be seen falling away from the club house.

The third inholding of a few acres lies directly on the bay shore near the Spanish Fort on the site formerly occupied by the fort landing. Title to this plot, claimed by the Dawes Estate, is in dispute. At the present time there is a small saw mill in active operation located here. As I could not see from Spanish Fort any signs of recent timbering in the immediate neighborhood, I judged that logs were being rafted from elsewhere for use at the mill.

#### Cost or Value of the Land

The Dawes Estate, according to Mr. Fuller, purchased the tract in 1925 at an average price of \$65 per acre. Considerable additional expenditures were required, however, to clear the title of squatters' claims. In the opinion of Mr. Fuller, the land could now be purchased for about \$85,000. This would not include the inholdings, nor the improvements owned by Mr. Fuller.

#### Promotion of Park Idea

Organizations interested in the establishment of a national park or monument at Spanish Fort are: The Mobile Chamber of Commerce; the Mobile Junior Chamber of Commerce; the Historic Mobile Preservation Society, of which Mrs. W. S. Pugh, of Mobile, is president; the Baldwin County Junior Historical Society, of which Miss Frances Baldwin is president; and the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs.

Also interested in the proposed development is Mr. Albert W. Gill, Director of Conservation, State of Alabama, and Mr. George E. Fuller, owner of the "Old Spanish Fort Tourist Village," and representative of the Dawes Estate.

According to Mr. Fuller, it was agreed at a meeting of the Dawes Estate held in Chicago last October, that the Estate should offer the Federal Government from 75 to 85 acres of land for park purposes. This would include Fort McDermott and Spanish Fort. Mr. Fuller also stated that the proposed gift had the approval of the R. F. C.

The establishment of a park was then considered by interested parties in Mobile and in Baldwin County, and, according to Mr. R. D. Hays, General Manager of the Mobile Chamber of Commerce, it was suggested that the amount of land which the Dawes Estate had manifested willingness to give, would be insufficient for park purposes. It was further suggested that from 400 to 500 acres, including all of the Confederate fortifications, should be acquired, funds for the purchase to be obtained by State appropriation or local subscription. Mr. Hays stated, that should the National Park Service be interested in the establishment of the park, the land would be acquired and given to the government. In this connection, Mr. Fuller said that he felt certain that the Dawes Estate

would sell a portion of the tract at a low per acre price, provided choice portions of the tract were left for development at an enhanced value.

If the old Spanish Fort is established as a park either by the Federal Government or the State, the ideal area that should be included, in my opinion, would be the entire Dawes tract together with all in-holdings. Acquisition of the entire tract, including the "Old Spanish Fort Tourist Village," might be impossible, however, due to lack of local ability or willingness to raise the funds for purchase. The minimum area that should be considered should be all of the Dawes Tract lying north and west of U. S. Highways 90 and 31, together with in-holdings. Recommendation of this smaller area would eliminate the necessity of purchasing Mr. Fuller's improvements and would leave the Dawes Estate valuable frontage on the two highways and on the Bay Shore south of U. S. 90.

#### Maps, Plans, and Special Reports

Plan: "Siege Operations at Spanish Fort" - Alabama State Department of Conservation Cooperating with the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service. (Original tracing either in Washington or Montgomery, Alabama.)

Chart: Coast and Geodetic - T-5530 - Air Photo Compilation, July 18, 1934. (Mobile Bay - Tensaw River - and Vicinity.)

Plan: Official plan of Siege Operations at Spanish Fort - See page 2 of this report.

Report: "Spanish Fort, Fort Morgan, Fort Gaines, Mobile Bay, Alabama," by Elizabeth C. Morison, Junior Historian, February 18, 1936. See file in office of Supervisor of Historic Sites, National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

Report: "The Proposed National Park at Spanish Fort and Old Blakely" by Clarence L. Johnson, Senior Foreman (Historian), Alabama SP-6, January 30, 1941. Regional Office File, Richmond, Virginia.

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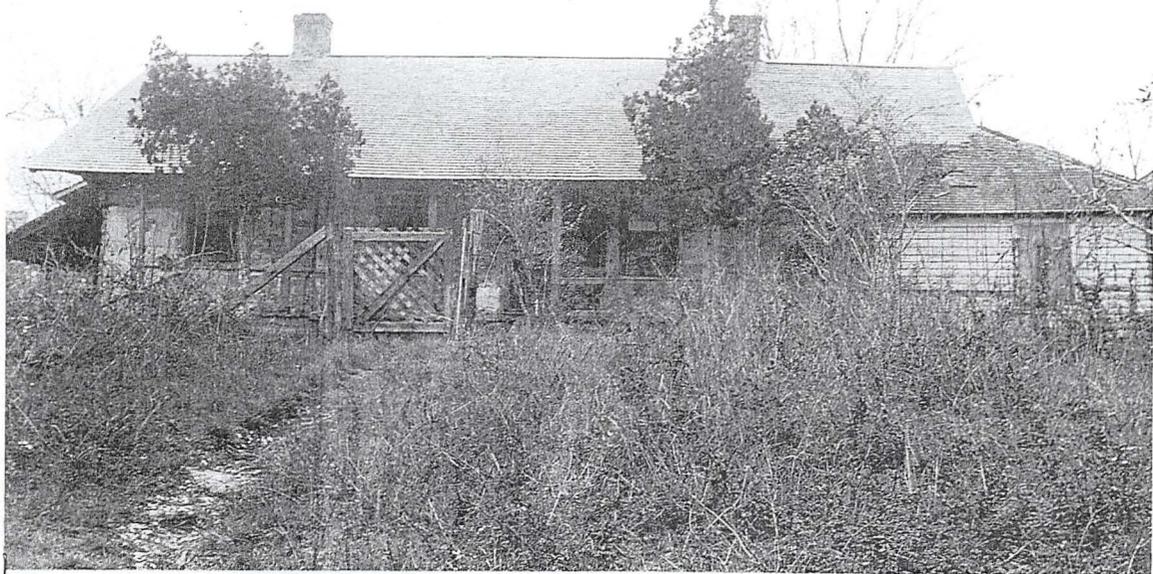
Looking toward Mobile Bay from Fort McDermott



Gun emplacements at Fort McDermott



A magazine at Fort McDermott

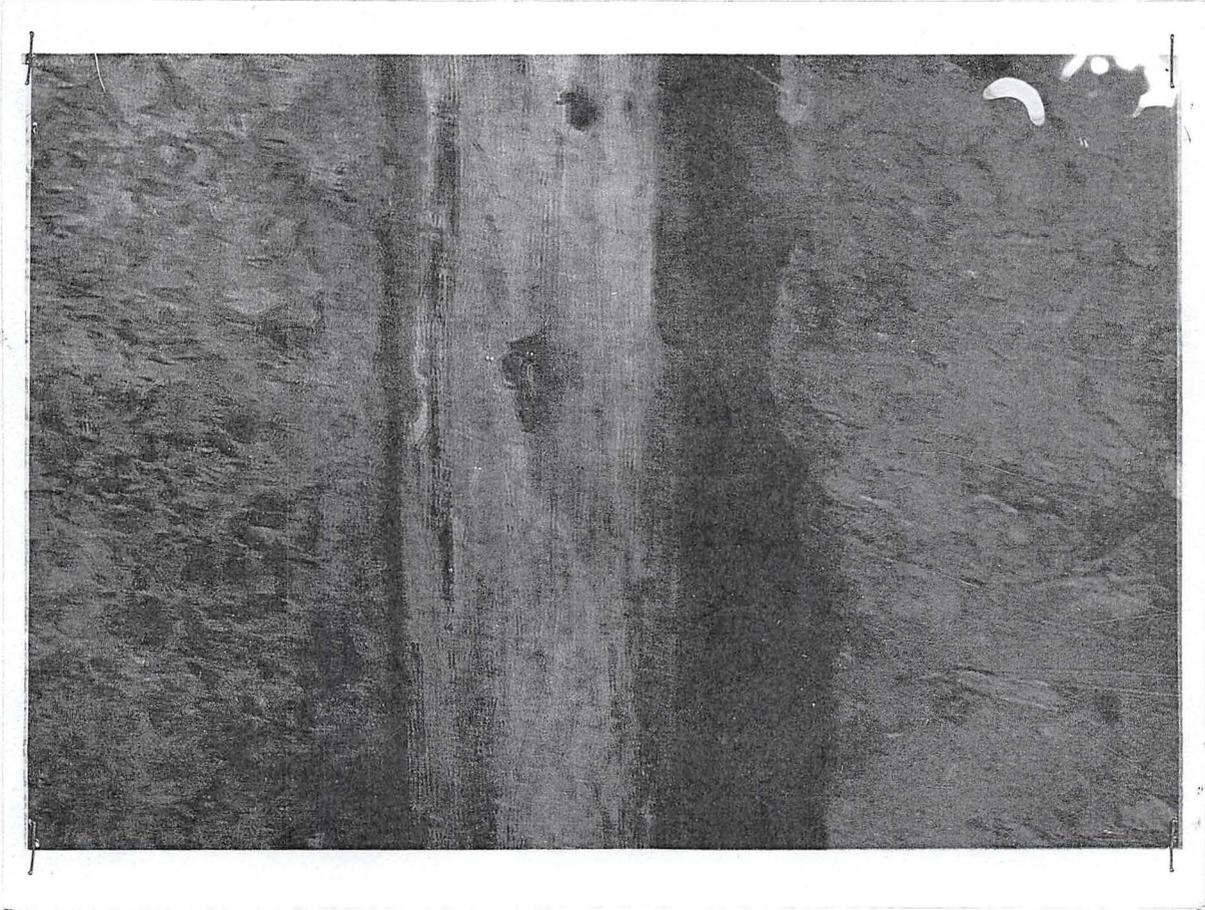


View of "Old Spanish Fort" ("Old French Fort") showing the front entrance which faces Krebs Lake. The structure is reputed to have been built in 1721 and so far as is known is the oldest in the lower Mississippi Valley.

In his book entitled, Mississippi the Heart of the South Vol. 1 p. 212 Dunbar Rowland states that the building was built by De La Point in 1718 on a land grant given to his aunt, a dutchess by Louis XIV. He also states that a sister of Admiral Farragut, was married in this house November 22, 1824 to Celestin Dupont, a kinsman of Admiral Dupont of the French Navy.



View of "Old Spanish Fort" ("Old French Fort") showing the rear entrance to the building. The porch represents a later addition while the roof has just been recently shingled.



View showing interesting details of construction.  
Note the walls of oyster shell and line also original  
timber.



View of section of the wall of "Old Spanish Fort" showing interesting type of oyster shell and lime construction. These walls are reputed to be approximately 18 inches thick.