

Reconstruction Era



The Treasury hired formerly enslaved people to bring in the 1862 Sea Islands cotton crop.

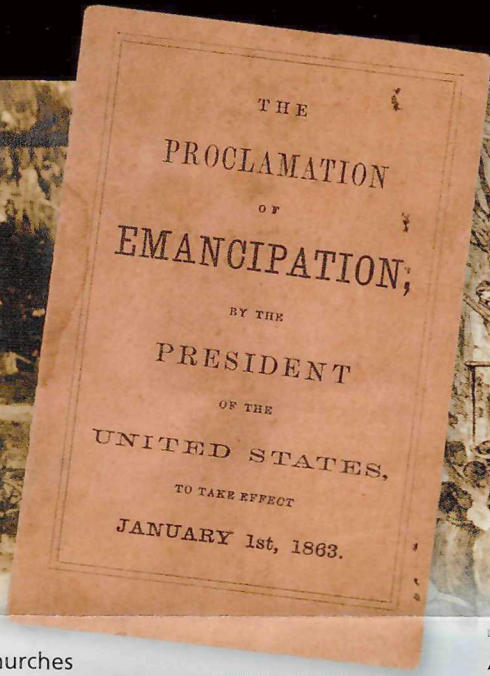


The effort to help fund the war against the Confederacy became an experiment in wage labor.



With help from the Pennsylvania Society, Penn School welcomed students in 1862 to classes in

reading, writing, spelling, geography, and arithmetic at Brick Baptist Church (above) on

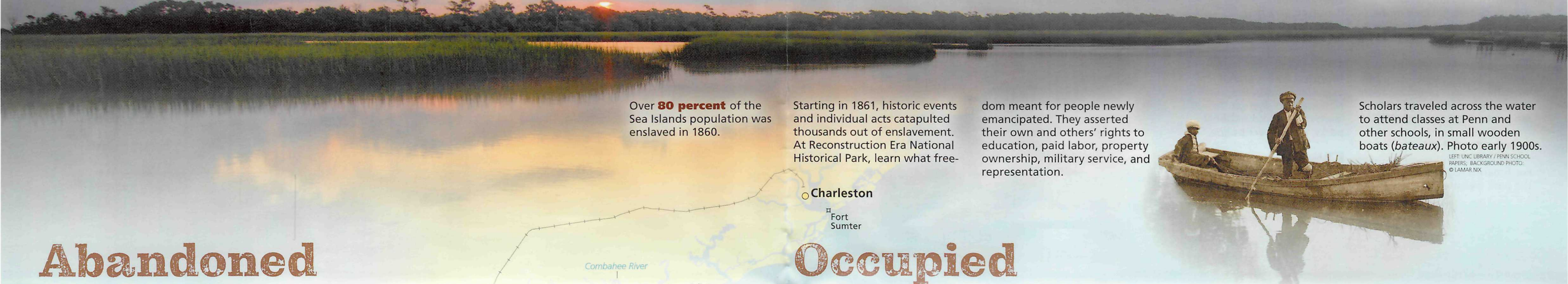


St. Helena. Schools and churches were formative institutions in the Reconstruction era.



A public reading of Abraham Lincoln's draft Emancipation Proclamation took place at Camp Saxton, January 1, 1863.

General Rufus Saxton, military governor of the Department of the South from 1862 to 1865, was an influential agent for change in the Sea Islands.



Abandoned

In November 1861, only seven months after the Civil War began, US military forces captured South Carolina's Port Royal Sound. They intended to establish a coaling station where steam-powered ships blockading the coast could refuel.

The greater impact of the capture became clear only after US forces came ashore on the Sea Islands. White residents had fled to the mainland, abandoning their properties and the people they had enslaved. In February 1862 the Treasury sent Edward Pierce to the Sea Islands to collect information. He reported a population of eight to ten thousand. Most were of African descent.

With support from the US Secretary of the Treasury, northern ministers, and the US military, Pierce planned and implemented a program of sweeping social and economic change in the Sea Islands. Its scope far exceeded that of the initial strategic military operation.



Occupied

Owing to the continued presence of its ships in Port Royal Sound and the adjacent rivers, the US military maintained a secure outpost in coastal South Carolina from 1862.

One reporter in the paper *New South* declared the occupation "not merely military." Business people and government officials mixed with the military, press, reformers, and abolitionists. Missionaries, mostly women, set up schools where freedpeople began to conquer illiteracy, forced on them by state law. Under the provisions of the Militia Act of 1862, formerly enslaved men began to join the 1st

South Carolina Volunteer Regiment of the US Army in the fall of 1862. They were based at Camp Saxton, the former John J. Smith Plantation on Port Royal.

Other barriers to equality fell in the occupied Sea Islands. Soon after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, over sixteen thousand acres, on which the Treasury foreclosed when absentee owners failed to pay their taxes, became available for purchase by "heads of families of the African race." The US government also reserved land for farm schools and other institutions to help people transition to life after slavery. Changes set in motion here, called the Port Royal Experiment, anticipated national Reconstruction.

The Beaufort District elected Smalls a delegate to the convention that wrote a new South Carolina Constitution, to the state House of Representatives, and to five terms in the US Congress.

Transformed

During the War Through education, the experiment began to change life in the Sea Islands. On St. Helena, Charlotte Forten, a free woman, joined Laura Towne and Ellen Murray to teach at Penn School in 1862. The school expanded in 1864, when Penn purchased 50 acres from freedman Hastings Gantt. Over one hundred other schools, helped by charities, opened soon after. Freedpeople pooled savings earned through wage labor to buy 10- to 20-acre plots of land. They created families, homes, and communities with churches, banks, and businesses.

After the War In the eight months after Lincoln's assassination in April 1865 and before the next US Congress convened, President Andrew Johnson pardoned many former Confederates, who then took control of civil governments in the South. Johnson's conciliatory policies ended sales of property abandoned in the war. The South Carolina state government passed discriminatory Black Codes. In December 1865, though, the states ratified the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution, abolishing slavery except as punishment for a crime. A year of tragedy and dispiriting reversals for freedpeople ended on a note of hope.

The 39th US Congress opened in January 1866. The Republican majority, led by Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner, sympathized with the freedpeople. It overturned the Black Codes and required South Carolina to rewrite its constitution, including freedpeople in the process. The resulting state constitution of 1868 created a public education system and removed statutes that prevented Black people from voting. Self-advocacy by freedpeople helped effect a nationwide change when the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution was ratified. It guaranteed citizenship and equal protection of the law to all people born in the United States.

Disfranchised In 1870 the 15th Amendment to the US Constitution extended the vote to all male citizens. Former Confederates resented the new political and social order, which they felt the federal government had imposed on them. To terrorize Black people and limit their rights, they created groups like the Ku Klux Klan and the South Carolina Red Shirts. To replicate enslavement under a new name, they implemented convict leasing. The pendulum of power swung away from federal authority and toward the states. By 1895 South Carolina had a new state constitution that disfranchised Black voters.

Reignited Reconstruction ended almost everywhere by 1900. Despite the gains and losses, the Jim Crow years, and the struggle for civil rights, St. Helena's people held fast to their land and history. Penn School and Brick Baptist Church, long open to the community, opened their doors wider. Penn School evolved by midcentury into a center where people came to learn life skills like reading tax forms, but also organizing for civil rights. Southern Christian Leadership Conference members met in Penn's classrooms in the 1950s and 1960s. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was among those who came here. He sometimes stayed at the center's Gantt Cottage with his young family.

The struggle for equality continued, as national civil rights leaders built on the work begun here a century earlier. In 2017, thanks in large part to the efforts of Sea Island residents, Reconstruction Era National Historical Park was established to tell the story of those who struggled to create "a more perfect Union."



At the 1963 March on Washington, citizens demanded the promises of Reconstruction for future generations.

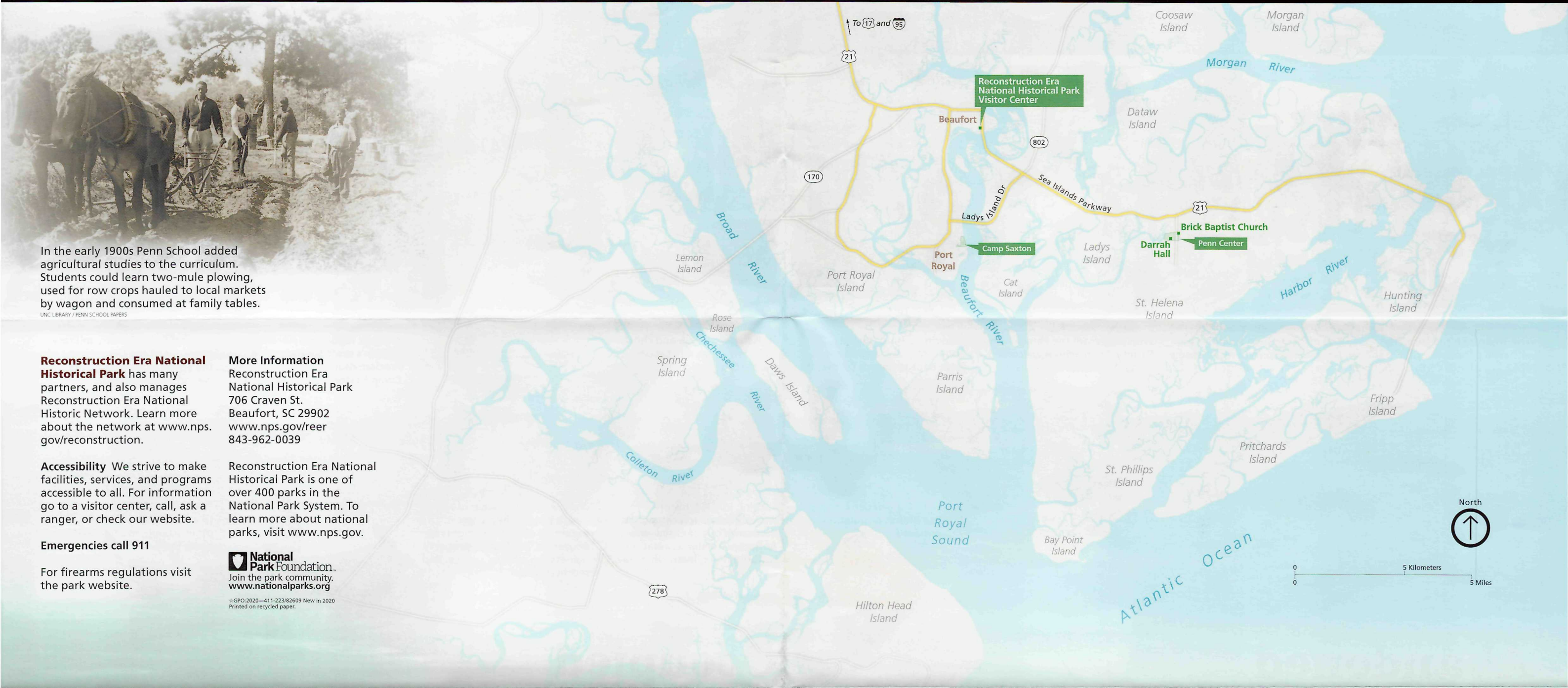


Harriet Tubman took part in a military raid in 1863 that freed over 700 people enslaved on rice plantations along the Combahee River.



Descendants of Sea Islands freedpeople continue to live on land their ancestors purchased here in the early 1860s. Photo after 1863.

South Carolina's Sea Islands



In the early 1900s Penn School added agricultural studies to the curriculum. Students could learn two-mule plowing, used for row crops hauled to local markets by wagon and consumed at family tables.

Reconstruction Era National Historical Park has many partners, and also manages Reconstruction Era National Historic Network. Learn more about the network at www.nps.gov/reconstruction.

Accessibility We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, call, ask a ranger, or check our website.

Emergencies call 911

For firearms regulations visit the park website.

More Information Reconstruction Era National Historical Park 706 Craven St. Beaufort, SC 29902 www.nps.gov/reer 843-962-0039

Reconstruction Era National Historical Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks, visit www.nps.gov.

National Park Foundation. Join the park community. www.nationalparks.org

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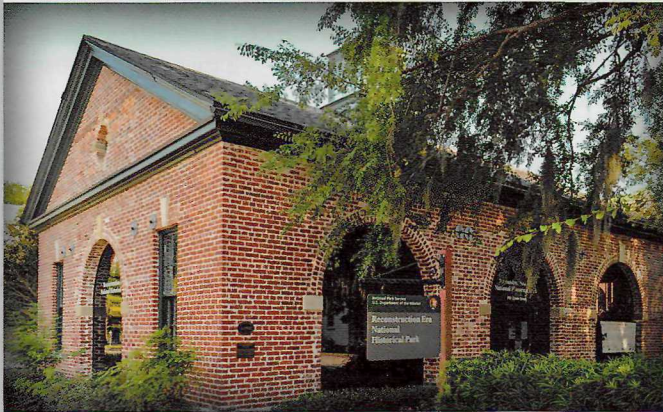
Gullah people create sweetgrass baskets that reflect their ancestors' traditions.

LEFT: WASTEBASKET BY LEOIA WRIGHT—AVERY RESEARCH CENTER FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE, COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON; RIGHT: EGG BASKET BY ELIZABETH MAZYCK—AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

BACKGROUND PHOTO © LAMAR NIX

Beaufort

National Historic Landmark District



Old Beaufort Firehouse, built ca. 1912, was donated to the park by a local family.

Memorial bust of Robert Smalls, Tabernacle Baptist Church, a short walk from the firehouse.



Begin your exploration of the Reconstruction era at the park visitor center in the Old Beaufort Firehouse. You'll find exhibits, publications, restrooms, and information about park programs. Parking is limited. Take a walking tour of the surrounding Beaufort National Historic Landmark District before you go to Penn Center and Camp Saxton. Visit the park website for current hours.



Penn Center

National Historic Landmark District, St. Helena Island



Brick Baptist Church, built 1855.

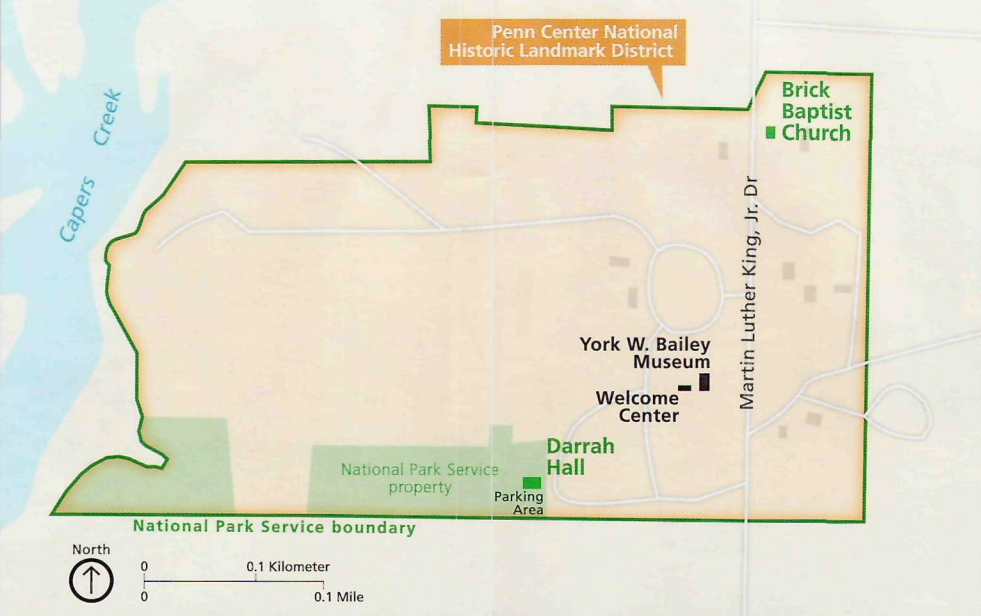
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

St. Helena residents built Darrah Hall as a center for community gatherings and recreation. All Penn Center's historic buildings are a short walk from the parking areas near Darrah Hall and the York W. Bailey Museum.



Darrah Hall (top), built ca. 1900.

Gantt Cottage (above), where Dr. King and his family stayed while visiting Penn Center.



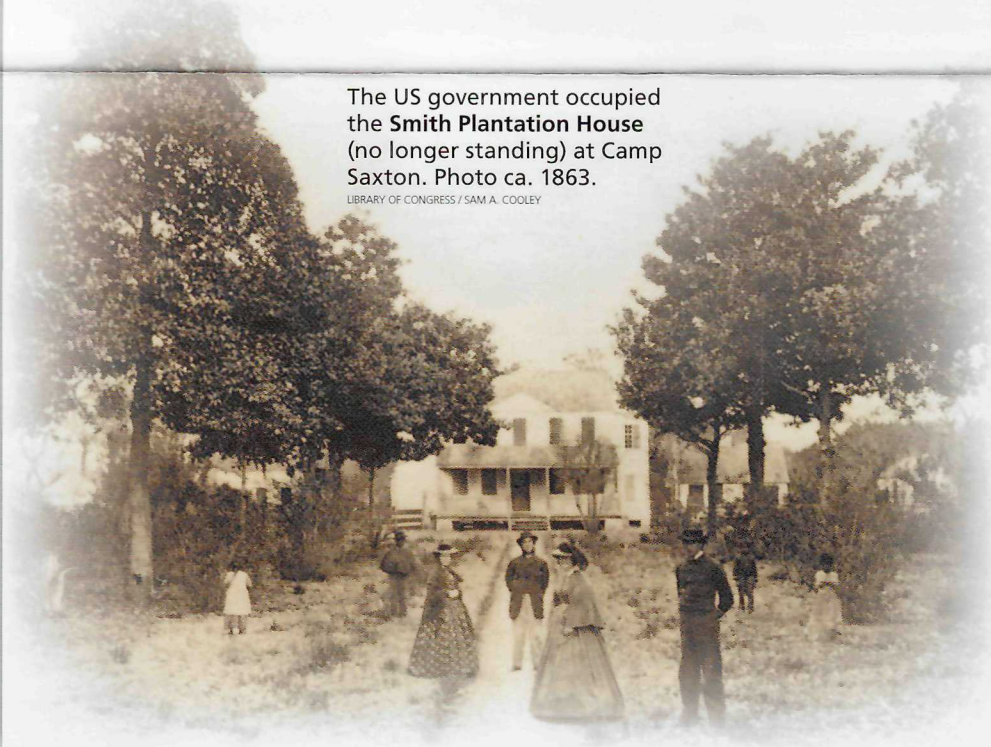
Camp Saxton

Port Royal



The first US Army regiment of South Carolina freedmen encamped here. On January 1, 1863, a large Emancipation Day jubilee took place at the camp. This historic site now lies partly within the present US Naval Support Facility Beaufort.

For the jubilee at Camp Saxton (above), tables for one thousand people were set up.



The US government occupied the Smith Plantation House (no longer standing) at Camp Saxton. Photo ca. 1863.

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