

A HISTORY OF STAR BLUFF, HORRY COUNTY, S.C.

By C.B. Berry  
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Star Bluff on the Waccamaw is a quiet community today that attracts fishermen and campers but is practically devoid of any commercial activity. It was not always so. Less than a century ago, the Gardner & Lacy Lumber Company, with headquarters in Georgetown, S.C., had the place alive with workmen removing the huge cypress trees from the abundant swampland and shipping them down to the mill to be cut into prized lumber. A number of other activities have occurred there in the years gone by.

A pioneer named Samuel Masters seems to be the first owner of record of Star Bluff. He was referred to as an Inn Keeper on Winyaw Bay near Georgetown where he obtained a grant for 600 acres of land on 19 June 1711. He also purchased lands in the same area in 1729 from Lewis John, an Indian Trader, in which he was referred to as a "Cooper." Travelers, passing over the ferry at Winyaw, often stopped in with Samuel Masters. He had a number of grants in and around Little River in the 1730's and an inlet at Cherry Grove Beach is referred to as "Masters Inlet" on the plat to one of these grants. He obtained a grant for 400 acres of land "called Star Bluff" on 28 August 1736 and, in this transaction, he was referred to as "Captain" Samuel Masters. It seems probable that he operated a boat carrying supplies on the Waccamaw during this time and which activity earned him the title of "Captain."

Samuel Masters died sometime prior to 1741 and his widow, Ann Masters, married Nathan Frink, son of Nicholas Frink, who came to the Little River area in the 1730's, from Connecticut, and for whom Little River Neck was called "Frinks Neck" for many years. Samuel and Ann Masters had only one daughter, Martha Masters who married, first, Dennis Hankins who owned Lot 143 in Georgetown, S.C. (S.C. Hist. Mag., Vol. IX, No. 2, April 1908) and from this marriage was born 2 sons, Dennis Hankins, Jr. and Masters Hankins.

Ann Masters Frink and her second husband, Nathan Frink, apparently made their home on Start Bluff for several years then sold out to old William Gause who was an Inn Keeper at Windy Hill Beach. A road ran directly from Windy Hill inland, crossing the Waccamaw River at Star Bluff. The deed is as follows:

Nathan Frink, to William Gause, Inn Keeper, all and whole, my stock of cattle on Waccamaw, likewise my sheep, 8 geese, and old canoe, and sundry household furniture, plantation tools, one desk with drawers, 1 large mahogany table, one small tea table, two small tea tables, 2 chests, 3 bedsteads, 1 couch and 2 feather beds, 3 iron pots, 1 tea kettle, 1 pair mill stones, 1 case quart bottles, 4 old chairs, axes and hoes, 2 grind stones and 400 acres of land, known as Star Bluff, for 300 pounds current money.

Nathan Frink puts William Gause into quiet possession of the land and mansion house and all rights except the "quit rents" hereinafter due his Majesty, "By delivery of Twig and Turf." The deed was signed on February 6, 1751, at Star Bluff on the Waccamaw. Nathan Frink apparently moved to North Carolina after selling out to William Gause. Also, several of William

Gause's sons also moved to North Carolina and settled, among other places, at what was to become Gause's Landing, just south of the present day Ocean Isle Beach. William Gause, Jr., who made his home there, entertained President George Washington with breakfast on Wednesday, April 27, 1791, during the president's Southern Tour. William Gause, Jr., who was also visited by Francis Asbury, the Methodist "Prophet of the Long Road", is buried in a small cemetery at Seaside, just southwest of the intersection of Highway 179 (the coastal highway) and Highway 904 in a grave that has no tombstone.

At least two of William Gause's sons obtained land in the Star Bluff area prior to the Revolutionary War. In Plat Book 16, Page 43, Pre-Revolutionary Plats, S.C. Archives are plats as follows: "By precept dated 2 March 1773, I have admeasured and laid out to John Gause a plantation or tract of land containing 200 acres situated on Wampee Swamp, waters of the Waccamaw River, in Prince George Parish, bounded on all sides vacant. Certified 20 June 1774. Alexius Mador Forster, D.S." Also on the same page is the following: "Below is tract of 100 acres of land granted to Benjamin Gause and situated at Star Bluff, and all sides bounded by vacant land. Certified 25 June 1774."

In later years, the Vereens and Bellemes came into possession of the land around Star Bluff. In Deed Book B-1, Page 227, Horry County Records, is the following: "I, John S. Dewitt, for \$100.00 paid by John Belleme, Jr., have sold one half of that plantation whereon I now live, known by the name of Wampee, situated on Waccamaw River near Star Bluff and bounded Westerly and Northerly on Waccamaw; Easterly on Cader Hughes land; Southerly on Mr. Duboise land, the said plantation or tract of land I heired from the estate of Jeremiah Vereen, deceased, in right of my wife.

"Also one other tract containing 500 acres surveyed and granted to the said Jeremiah Vereen adjoining the aforesaid land and is bounded South on Cader Hughes and William Belleme's land; West on Star Bluff land and North on Waccamaw River. 5 February 1819 (42<sup>nd</sup>. year of U.S. Independence). Signed John S. Dewitt. Wit: William Bellemee and John Harris, Junr."

Boats plying the Waccamaw River furnished supplies for the countryside at Wampee and Star Bluff. In an interview with Thomas Walter Livingston (b. 1876) on September 17, 1959, he stated the following to this writer: "Hagens and Banter, from New York, ran a store right at the river at Star Bluff about seventy five years ago. They also ran the Star Bluff Ferry at the time. After some years, they closed up and left."

In the Horry County Records, Deed Book S, Page 765, is the following: "December 18, 1877 – Deed for 30 acres of land at Star Bluff conveyed to Frederick A. Higgins and Albert Z. Banta ('Carpenters in trade under the firm name of Higgins & Banta') ... being a portion of a tract originally granted to Samuel Masters 5 June 1742 for 400 acres and subsequently conveyed to John Harris and by John Vereen and William Lee, heirs of John Harris, conveyed to me about 1836 ... Robert Livingston ... dower, Hellon P. Livingston."

The 1880 census records show: Little River Township:

Albert Z. Banta, Age 27 (white, male)

Frederick A. Higgins, Age 29 (white, male)

On August 10, 1959, I interviewed Mr. Isaac Purley Edge (May 13, 1887 – Sept. 30, 1966), son of Isaac P. “Handy” Edge and his wife, Cenith Grainger, who made their home where the Forest Lake Subdivision in North Myrtle Beach is located. Mr. Purley operated the first hardware business in Ocean Drive Beach, adjacent to the corner lot at the intersection of Main Street and Ocean Boulevard. The property is still owned by his heirs as this is written. He stated that Banta, of Higgins and Banta, of Star Bluff, was crippled. He said he just could remember this as a tiny child.

Frederick A. Higgins was the first postmaster for Wampee when the post office was established 3 March 1880. Since Higgins operated a store at Star Bluff, it would seem likely that the post office was located there but I have no information on this. Other postmasters for Wampee were William S. Thompson appointed 5 January 1881; Marcus Bear Thompson, appointed 13 June 1889; and Katherine M. (Bogie) Ward, 29 May 1919. She served for more than twenty years and was succeeded by Mrs. R.E. Bell who was the last postmaster for Wampee.

Grover Lee (“Mark”) Bellamy (1891 – Jan. 17, 1968) represented Horry County in the South Carolina Legislature (with H. Kemper Cooke) for the term 1931-1932. I interviewed Mark on August 15, 1959, and he stated that when the highway department was planning U.S. Highway 17 (it was originally Highway No. 31), it was routed to come up from Myrtle Beach and cross the Waccamaw River at Star Bluff. He stated that part of the right-of-way had already been cleared. In such a location, the highway would have missed all of the Northern Horry Beaches (the Intracoastal Waterway did not exist then). He contacted Highway Commissioner Charles H. Moorefield and others and arranged to relocate the highway to its present location. This apparently was the connection of Highway 9 with the new U.S. Highway 17.

The Star Bluff Ferry was re-chartered on 3 June 1902 by James B. Morse for a period of 21 years. His charter was certified by Joseph Todd, County Supervisor; Ray Worley and W.L. Hardee, county commissioners. It was a small ferry and, after automobiles came upon the scene, they were ferried over, one at a time. Morse was apparently succeeded by Duke Watts and his family who were the last operators. There was no need for a ferry after the Waccamaw River bridges were built on S.C. Highway 9 and it was discontinued. The ferry had existed for approximately two and a half centuries.



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