

Ex-Governor Lived Here

ISLAND PACKET 7/29/76

HON. BENJAMIN GUERARD
(1739-1788)
**South Carolina Revolutionary
Era Statesman**

By Dr. Robert E.H. Peeples

Benjamin Guerard is an example of the fluidity of the S.C. aristocracy which allowed him to rise to its highest pinnacle.

He was born in Charleston, son of a successful merchant, John Guerard and his wife Elizabeth, a daughter of Indian Commissioner Charles Hill. As a young man he read law and was admitted to the S.C. Bar in 1761. He acquired a plantation on St. Helena's Island and practiced law in both Beaufort and Charleston.

From St. Michael's Parish, Charleston, he was elected to the Commons House of Assembly in 1766. In November of that year he married Sally Middleton, daughter of Col. Thomas Middleton, planter of Boochawe Plantation and Howe Hall, commander of the S.C. Regiment during the Cherokee War, and his first wife, Mary Bull, daughter of Capt. John Bull of Bull's Island. Sally's grandfather was Gov. Arthur Middleton of Middleton Place, president of the Council of the People of South Carolina during the "Glorious Revolution" of 1719.

Hilton Head Island became the part-time home for Guerard when he acquired 350-acre Fairfield Plantation along Skull Creek. Its bumper crops of subsidized indigo yielded a tidy profit. He began negotiating with Landgrave Bayley's heirs for additional Hilton Head lands.

From the outbreak of the Revolution, Guerard was identified with the American cause, representing St. Helena's Parish in the House of Representatives from 1778 until May 12, 1780 when he was captured at the surrender of Charleston by Continental Commander Gen. Benjamin Lincoln. He accepted parole. But in May 1781 the British commander of Charleston, in

open contravention of the terms of capitulation, arrested 129 of the leading Militia officers and men of South Carolina and confined them aboard two prison ships in Charleston harbor.

Guerard was held aboard the Pack Horse with other prominent men identified with Hilton Head Island such as William Elliott, Dr. George Mosse and three Barnwell brothers. The ship was ordered to Philadelphia for an official exchange of prisoners. As it neared the North Carolina coast, the prisoners overpowered the guards, seized control of the vessel and sailed her into port. "After many perils" the ex-prisoners made their way home safely.

In December 1781, Benjamin Guerard was elected to represent St. Helena's Parish in the state senate. This was the noted Jacksonborough Legislature which met at tiny Jacksonborough on the Edisto River 30 miles south of Charleston. It was still occupied by the British.

Gen. McCrady wrote, "A more distinguished body of men had never before, and never after, met in the State of South Carolina, nor perhaps in any other State in the Union." In the spirit of reconciliation this august body dealt most charitably and reasonably with their fellow Carolinians who had felt it their bounden duty to remain loyal to their temporal lord, King George III.

Guerard was appointed a justice of the peace and a commissioner to negotiate with the British to prevent plunder and insure an orderly transfer of governmental functions at their evacuation of Charleston. He served on the Privy Council in 1782-1783 under Gov. John Mathews.

On Feb. 4, 1783, Guerard was elected Gov. of South Carolina and served the full two-year term. Although he was a devout Episcopalian, he was sensible of his French Huguenot heritage and in 1783 was one of the incorporators of the Calvinistic

Church of French Protestants in Charleston. And as an expression of his interest and concern for higher education, in 1785 he accepted election to the Board of Trustees of the College of Cambridge, Ninety-Six District.

Hilton Head Island had proved so appealing to Benjamin Guerard that by the war's end he owned or had leased more than 1,700 acres here, including Fairfield and Marshlands Plantations. With the end of the British subsidy on indigo, profits from planting were less than guaranteed for the following few years. In 1784 the Bayley heirs instituted a lawsuit against him for his failure to cultivate leased lands. However, the boom in land sales which resulted from Dr. George Mosse's 1783 Survey and subdivision of Bayley's Barony apparently resulted in the abandonment of the suit.

At the conclusion of his term as governor, Guerard again was elected to the House of Representatives from St. Helena's Parish for the 1785-1786 term. In this capacity he was influential in choosing the site at the juncture of the Broad and Congaree Rivers as the location for Columbia, the projected capital city of South Carolina.

This was a great disappointment to Gen. Thomas Sumter and his associates who had speculated heavily in lands around Stateburg, their proposal for the capital. The legislature first met in Columbia in 1790. Among those whose presence was deeply missed was the former governor. He had died shortly before Christmas in 1788 on December 21. His body was laid to rest in the churchyard of St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Charleston with full honors due a Revolutionary War statesman and hero.

His second wife, Marianne Kennan whom he had married in 1786, survived him. His Hilton Head Island Fairfield Plantation was purchased by Capt. Jack Stoney; his Marshlands Plantation by Thomas Webb.