

Museum Around the Corner

The Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

Screven - Perrie Dispute ©

In the history of Georgetown, one finds a mystery as to how two different families both claimed ownership of the same acreage upon which our town now stands. Records of the time are crystal clear in one aspect of ownership and murky in how the dispute was settled. Elizabeth Ashford, master historian and researcher of Georgetown history, explained the story in her 1975 presentation to the Historical Society. Excerpts of her research are given here.

“Few settlers occupied the land that later became the town of Georgetown on the Sampit River by 1705. In that year, this land was granted by the Lord’s Proprietors of the Carolinas to John and Edward Perrie. John was a native of Ireland. Being a man of wealth, he moved to the Leeward Islands where he was a member of the Council and Provost Marshall. In 1704, he entered into an agreement with John Abraham Mott to ship certain goods on the Brigantine Success to his Carolina property to begin a plantation. The goods shipped were “twenty-five negroes and divers [sic] goods and utensils”. Mott was to remain ten years and receive half of the profits. He settled in Christ Church Parish to operate a plantation for Mr. Perrie. On 5 April, 1705 he procured warrants for six tracts of land at Winyah.

By 1708, John Perrie had removed to England and made his will by which he devised his plantations to his daughter, Mary Perrie who was a minor at the time of his death in 1713.

In the meantime, things were happening in Carolina. William Screven, a Baptist minister had come to Charles Town and took up land in Christ Church Parish. Records show that in 1710, John Abraham Mott entered into an agreement with William Screven to deliver within six months deeds of conveyance of the lands at Winyah, 1,550 acres from Perrie. There is no record of Perrie giving Mott the authority to enter into such arrangement and no deeds are given. However, Screven stated in his will that his burial place was never to be sold. Records show that he died in Georgetown in 1713. However, in that year, no town existed yet. Screven devised his lands at Winyah to his wife Bridgette Screven who by her will of 29 June, 1717 left the 1,550 acres to her son Elisha Screven.

In 1729/30, Governor Robert Johnson, in a communication to the Board of Trade and American Plantations in England, informs them that many people are upon Wyneau River and conceives it necessary to lay out a town on the settlement on that river and make it a port of entry.

A map of the Cherokee Nations and the Path thereunto made by George Hunter says, “...Wineau Bar. I sounded ye channel and at low water neap tide found 10 foot of water...and 16 ½ foot at high tide. George Town is laid out in lots and sold last year (1729). They expect there a Port of Entry to ease them of the freight to Charles Town. They have one foot less than Charles Town.”

In November of 1732 the South Carolina Gazette announced that George Town was made a Port of Entry. In December of 1734 Screven again gives notice in the paper that all people interested in George Town may procure titles from him.

While this was taking place in Carolina, Mary Perrie had come of age and in 1728 she married John Cleland. She and her husband to come to Carolina. On their arrival they found the property at Winyah in the hands of Screven. They found a town laid out on what they thought was a plantation.

On 10 July, 1735, a notice appeared in the South Carolina Gazette informing the people that the land on which George Town was laid out was legally the property of Mary Perrie Cleland, having been left to her by her father, John Perrie, and that no power or authority had been given for the sale of the lots. There is nothing in the record to show the further progress of the controversy as to the ownership of George Town. On 1 January, 1736 John Cleland subscribed Two Hundred Pounds for the building of the church in George Town or one hundred acres for a glebe [property of the minister to farm for income] .

An adjustment was made and some compensation paid to Elisha Screven and the Clelands were reinstated in possession of all their lands outside of George Town. The deed is dated 30 June, 1739 and it was between John Cleland and his wife, Elisha Screven, George Pawley, William Swinton and Daniel LaRoche, trustees, and all the parties to whom lots were sold. The title to lots sold were confirmed by John Cleland and wife upon payment to them for eighteen pounds for each lot. In other words, the lot owners had to pay again! This does not seem fair and perhaps caused a hardship for those who had already built their houses. Some had bought several lots and since they had been required in their original deeds to build a building of sixteen by twenty two feet with a brick chimney within fifteen months, they had already spent quite a sum.

The lots reserved for Elisha Screven for himself were confirmed free from payment to the Clelands. According to the terms of the new deed, the Clelands were allowed to add eighty-eight lots. These were added in two sections. One ran on the west side from Front to Church Street and between Wood and the present day Cleland Street. The other on the east side from Front to Church Street and between Cannon Street and the present St. James Street.

A date is not given for the addition of ninety-one lots east of St. James and south of Highmarket Street. This addition was the property of Charles Brown, Esq., and Dr. Joseph Blythe, and is called Brown Town.

There are two other odd names that cannot be accounted for. The area on Front Street between Cannon and St James used to be called Hungry Neck. Then the area on Front Street near Orange and King is called Vinegar Hill. No one knows why..“