

**INTERVIEW WITH THE BROTHERS, CHARLES P. PINCKNEY,  
THOMAS DAVANT PINCKNEY and DeSAUSSURE E. PINCKNEY on  
SPRING ISLAND,  
FEBRUARY 23RD, 1994.**

DeSaussure E. Pinckney  
Date of Birth: April 2nd, 1929  
Place of Birth: Spring Island, S.C.

Charles P. Pinckney  
Date of Birth: November 6th, 1932  
Place of Birth: Ridgeland, S.C.  
(Family was Living on Spring Island)

Thomas Davant Pinckney  
Date of Birth: May 14th, 1935  
Place of Birth: Ridgeland, S.C.  
(Family was living on Spring Island)

Father's Name : DeSaussure Edwards Pinckney Sr.

Mother's Name : Margaret Niver

Siblings : DeSaussure, Charles, Tommy, Betty, William, Judy, Mary.

Q : Could you go back and recall your earliest memories of Spring Island.

**deSAUSSURE:** My earliest memories of the island was when we lived at Laurel Point, they call it something else now, (Walker Landing) I was born right there in my Grandfather's House and we lived there till I was about 4 years old, then we moved down the island towards the gazebo. We had a house in there it was the old Copp House before they built the big mansion.

Q : Can you describe the way of life here on the island at that time, did you enjoy living here as a young child?

Oh yeah, yeah.

Q : What did you do for recreation?

Played, climbed trees. I swam a lot - the three gentlemen all agreed about swimming a lot together with fishing and crabbing.

Mamma used to do a lot of fishing. Daddy used to say he would get the big boat called the Columbia, I used to think it was a ship, I think it was about 60 feet long and he would go and leave grits in the house, come back, and Mamma had gone out and caught fish and would have fried fish and grits. Sometimes she would go out and catch shrimp and we would have shrimp with brown gravy and grits.

**CHARLES** : Daddy didn't earn much money but we never did go hungry over here.

**deSAUSSURE** : Oh Charles, he made a lot of money, he made \$40 a month! As long as we were at the river there was always something to eat you know.

Another thing I can remember were the cotton fields, there was a cotton gin and they were able to bale their own cotton and gin it and the commissary was in the same building right by the big house. There used to be a big red barn down there between the gazebo and the house.

Corn, they raised cattle of course, a lot of good cattle, black angus cattle.

There was lots of vegetables, gardens like you wouldn't believe. There were citrus trees, lemons and oranges. Mamma used to tell the story that I would reach up and make a hole in the bottom of the tangerine and pull the inside out and leave the skin still hanging on the tree.

My Grandfather used to put up a lot of the vegetables and canned tomatoes and he had a smokehouse and he would kill the hogs and put them in a salt vat for so many days or weeks and then put them in the smokehouse and had to keep the smoke going for 24 hours a day. There was always plenty of food and once a month Mama would go to Savannah to the A&P and get a whole lot of groceries for \$10 and bring them back and pile them up on the table. Sometimes we would get lucky and we could go with her, not too often.

Q : Do you remember going in the Copp's House?

Oh yeah.

**CHARLES** : It was scary to me because those Pekingese dogs, you walk up the back walk they'd scare you to death, barking and all.

**deSAUSSURE** : They stayed upstairs on the front porch. I never did go upstairs to their room and their bathroom, there was a bunch of them, I was scared of them too. I could see them from downstairs. As well as I can remember, Daddy told me there were 58 of them. Mrs. Copp loved them dogs.

**CHARLES** : Most of the time I went to the big house, I went to the kitchen because I knew the maid Genevieve and I would go and talk to her. I heard she was here

yesterday, I haven't seen her in years and years.

**deSAUSSURE** : One time Mama told us she was back there by the gazebo on the path to the creek, we had our row boat down there, Mama said we must stay in the yard she was going down to try and catch herself a sheepshead. It seemed about 5 minutes later she came back with one so big she had to go down to Genevieve and borrow a pan big enough to bake it in.

**CHARLES** : Did anyone tell you about the turtle pens? They were down by Mr. Copp's house, you walked down by the dock from the land side on the left there used to be a fenced in area called the turtle pen. Mr. Copp loved turtle meat and he always kept two or three turtles in there.

**deSAUSSURE** : They were them big old sea turtles, it is against the law to catch them now but at that time they did anything.

**CHARLES** : I remember them butchering one of them in that building where the Chinamen stayed. Tell about the Chinamen, deSaussure.

**deSAUSSURE** : There were two of them, two chefs, they came over and they were gourmets. Mrs. Copp hired them and they told her that the kitchen was theirs and they would handle it and don't interfere with them, - they talked broken English. Mrs. Copp came down one time and told them what to do one of them told her to get out of the kitchen and she barked back at him and he grabbed a piece of stove wood and started after her and she grabbed the wood and threw it back down in the box and told them to get him off the island, so they took him off the island. They lasted about a week and then they were gone.

**CHARLES** : I can remember them butchering them turtles, I know one particular occasion, they had the shell - of course I was just a little fellow - the shell seemed as though it was as big as a table. I was trying to get Daddy to get me the shell so that I could make me a boat out of it!

Q : Do you remember some of the people that visited the island?

**deSAUSSURE** : Mostly Mr. Swain, across the river, he would come over with his boat. Judge Forrest used to come and Harry Cram used to come over.

**CHARLES** : Harry Cram used to fly his airplane over here and landed it. He used to land his airplane down in the timberline field.

**deSAUSSURE** : Not to visit the Copps, but at least once a month the Pinckney Clan would come over here to my Grandfathers.

Q : How long after Mr. Copp died did the Pinckneys stay on the island?

**deSAUSSURE** : Very little time, not very long. Mrs. Copp married a man out of Savannah that nobody liked, Mr. Mills. I have a tape of Lee Mitchell who used to farm over here, he's dead now, he speaks real good gullah and he says a little off color words in it, but not bad, and we talked about the island and Mr. Mills, its a good story you should hear it, it's about 2 hours.

Q : What about schooling?

We went to Bluffton, "Tommy you didn't, did you?"

**TOMMY** : No I didn't go to school until Ridgeland.

**deSAUSSURE** : Charles and I went to stay with our Grandfather Niver in Pritchardville, we stayed there from Sunday evening until Friday and then Daddy would pick us up on the mainland in the big boat. I went to the 6th Grade in Bluffton.

**CHARLES** : I went in the 3rd Grade. I went for 5 years until we left the island.

**deSAUSSURE** : A little humorous story. My Aunt Leonora was still living over here with our Grandfather when she was a young lady and her husband, not then, was coming over here and courting her, his name was Joe Graham, and my Granddaddy, being a Pinckney with the wit they got and the devilishness he saw him rowing, rowing, rowing and oh I guess two hours later, it should have taken him fifteen minutes to get there, he pulled up to the beach and my Granddaddy hollered down to him, "Son, you know if you had pulled up the anchor, you could have gotten here quicker"!

Aunt Leonora married him but he died real young, Aunt Leonora died about 3 months ago and Aunt Sadie is over in Bayview in Beaufort. Aunt Sadie used to be able to yodel, oh Lord, she could yodel.

They would get on the front porch and Uncle Devant would play the guitar and the boys and girls would get around my Granddaddy and he would pick the guitar and they would just sit around and harmonize and I mean it was amazing.

**CHARLES** : I've heard that people on the other side of the river could hear them. You know people lived over here just like a big family.

**deSAUSSURE** : On Saturday nights, the black folks would get into that moonshine liquor and they would cut each other up with razor blades. I don't know whether it happened one time or several times but they would always go to my Granddaddy when they got cut pretty bad and my Grandfather one time he took to cussing on them and saying they got no business playing with razors and it was on his cheek back there (indicating his rear end) and he pulled his pants down and took a needle and thread and sewed it up and poured turpentine on the wound.

And then, Borro (?) cut his nose off, well it was just hanging on. Boro didn't cut his

nose off he cut Haskells off and it was just hanging on and Daddy had to use his car to go to the doctor in Ridgeland, he still got the nose and he is still living. His name was Haskell Jenkins, the one that got cut, Boro was his brother.

**TOMMY :** I want to tell you one on "Deso" now! We were just kids and I had a ladder up on the house and Deso came out and jerked the ladder from under me and I fell down, I didn't get hurt, Deso was under the ladder. The funny part was that Daddy got after Deso and he was running round and round the house and Daddy was chasing him with his belt and Deso was hollering "Help", "Help" and Mama stuck her head out of the back of the house and called to Daddy, "Desi, for God's sake don't kill him" and Daddy said, "Heck, I haven't even caught him yet"!

**deSAUSSURE :** I could go under the house and come out the other side and he would be right behind me. It wasn't a belt either, it was a rope.

**CHARLES :** How about when Mama chased you and ran across the Ford .

**deSAUSSURE :** That month's supply of groceries, they had these pop-open cans and I was playing with them and popping them open and Mama came in and found all this stuff running and said "Who did this"? and I said "Not me, not me" and of course she knew I did it then. She got so mad and cut out after me and I ran out the front door and I ran down and there was this old Ford truck, big stick body truck, and I jumped on the back of that truck and ran across and jumped off the front of the body of the hood and I thought, "Hmn, I got away now" and then she jumped right on my back, she came right across it. I came out of there smoking, I tell you!!

**Q :** Do you remember any remedies or natural medicines people used?

**deSAUSSURE :** They used a lot of sassafras to make sassafras tea. Some of the colored people used herbs and stuff.

**CHARLES :** They used rabbit tobacco tea for colds. It was wild, they made a tea out of it and also put sassafras with that too.

**deSAUSSURE :** Mama would dig up them roots and skin them down and it would smell real good.

**CHARLES :** For colds Mama would put them mustard plasters on our chests.

**deSAUSSURE :** Oh yes, and we always had our Spring and Fall dose of castor oil.

**TOMMY :** Seemed like we used to also have codliver oil poured down us right regular too.

**deSAUSSURE :** And Grovers Chill Tonic we had to have a dose of that ever so

often. It had little flakes in it, I guess it had a lot of iron in it. There used to be an old tractor that was rusted up behind our house and Mama used to say, "That iron came out of that old tractor you had better have some".

Q : Did you all see much of Mr. Copp?

**deSAUSSURE** : When he used to ride his horse around we would see him quite a bit, but he was kind of getting old a bit and he would stay right close to the house.

**CHARLES** : I have heard that Mr. Copp used to drink but now Granddaddy he was out riding his horse one day and came upon this black guy who had found the liquor still and he had done drank much of the liquor and was passed out on the ground and his horse was eating the mash and drinking the liquor and the horse had done passed out on the ground as well!

**deSAUSSURE** : Oh, and the story about behind the red barn down here that was where the vat was where they ran the cows through, just close to the river but still right close behind the barn and right on down behind that was a big saw mill and they used to saw their own lumber. They had a big steam engine and Daddy used to keep that up and run that, he used to take care of everything on the house and then some of the blacks in the winter time it would be so cold they didn't want to cut the wood so they knocked the weather boarding off the house and burned the weather boarding, so next summer they had to build the house again!

Q : Did it get very cold here?

You know I can remember after rains that we could go out on my roof and break off the icicles about twelve inches long, we'd suck on them like candy.

**CHARLES** : I can remember one particular occasion we lived in the house, the little bed I had, we slept under the cover must have been a foot thick it seemed. Mama brought in a bowl of water and set it up on the dresser and said, "I want you to look at this in the morning". We got up next morning and that water was frozen solid in that bowl.

**deSAUSSURE** : There was no other heat other than in the fireplace, of course Daddy would get up and build a fire and we would run out there flying and get dressed quick. In the winter we would hover around the fireplace to keep warm. I remember one time I don't know whether it was snowed or ice or what but I remember the whole yard was white, Daddy took off in that old truck, pick-up stripped down to what it was and that old thing started sliding and slipping and shaking like jello.

Q : Do you remember any haunted areas on the island, did you ever hear of anyone talking about spirits and things?

The black folk were afraid of things. They said if you took a lock of somebody's hair

and put it in the ground by the steps, they were going to die. That was one superstition.

Q : Any other stories you can recall?

**CHARLES** : One I can remember was when a bunch of Daddy's brother-in-laws got together and they were drinking and they would try and tie the plates down on the table but the plates kept moving!

Jimmy Niver who was supposed to come with me today. He and I went up to catch some mullet and we caught so many you would not believe and I was driving the car then, I had learned to drive the truck, and we put the tub in the back with a bunch of tin cans and boxes and whatever and we went up the island and every house we stopped at we put a pile of fish up there and when we come back there was watermelons at some places, and turnip greens and cantaloupe at some places. Almost every place they had put something for us. We were just giving them away. I suppose they wanted to return the favor.

**TOMMY** : We had this goat when I was a kid, Mr. Copp gave it to us with a wagon, it was built like a miniature horse wagon built for the size of a goat and he gave us the goat and the wagon. The goat died the next day so he bought us another goat but that second goat was real mean. That goat was only scared of Daddy.

But I remember, Jimmy Niver and Deso they were on the front porch of the house and they were running real fast just ahead of the goat and they would run up the old oak tree leaning against the porch teasing the goat. They were trying to tease me to come play with the goat but I said no because I didn't want that goat butting me. They finally talked me into it and I was taking off there and I got almost to the tree and that goat caught me and but me right over the bluff!! I hit the ground on all fours and it was just a sand beach and all of a sudden the goat hit right down beside me and I thought, "Oh my goodness the goat done jumped over after me", I looked up at the bluff and Daddy was up there with a broom he done hit the goat and it had gone off right behind me.

**CHARLES** : Then we had a rooster, the meanest rooster ever born, that rooster done spurred me in the head and then he got Mama up on top of the saw and she three all of the firewood she could get her hands on and finally broke its leg and put him in the pot.

Mama also shot a chicken hawk in the chicken pen one morning.

Q : How about the weather, were there any big storms you recall?

**ALL THREE** : In 1940, we all think about that one.

**deSAUSSURE** : Golly, that is the one that took the Columbia across and put it way

across on land on the other side of the river but we left the island. It was a bad hurricane.

That old big barn, it blew it right off of its foundation.

Q : Can you think of any way to describe living on Spring Island?

"It was in your blood, a wonderful place".

"I loved it so much I still live in the area, over on little Cheechessee"

"We used to live high on the hog and thought we was poor - now people are paying a fortune for what we used to eat every day"

Interviewed by Beryl LaMotte.