

Interview with Paul Cotesworth Pinckney and his sister Mary Pinckney Powell on Spring Island, February 23rd, 1994.

Mary Pinckney Powell
Born: October 23rd, 1909

Paul Cotesworth Pinckney
Born : January, 29th, 1912.

Place of Birth: Guerard Point (Pinckney Colony)
 Bluffton. South Carolina.

Fathers Name : William Eustice Pinckney - Married 4 Times, had 20 Children.
Mothers Name : Catherine Kirk Pritchard

Asked to recollect early memories of Spring Island.

Paul Pinckney:

My father used to tell us so much about it because he was connected with the Hunting Club and that was before he bought "the point" and Mr. Folwell, (pronounced "Fowel" but spelt as is) he was the President of the Hunting Club and they were very wealthy people all of them that came down and belonged to the club.

Just a few of the things that impressed me.

Mr. Folwell. When the club broke up, well before it broke up. There was one fellow, a Mr. Roblind who was a very good friend of his that belonged to the hunting club also and he came to my Father one time and said, "Mr. Pinckney, you know, they built a great big ship called "The Titanic", its one of the largest ships in the world, oh, its goin to be a bunch of money on that ship, I'm going back to Southhampton and come back on that boat, he was a big gambler, he liked to gamble and he went and got on the boat in Southhampton and he went down on The Titanic. Mr. Roblind, he was a very good friend of my Father's and of course when the club finally broke up, Mr. Copp bought it then. We always heard from Mr. Folwell at Christmas time, he would send us a barrel of apples and all kinds of stuff like that for the "chilrens".

MARY PINCKNEY POWELL:

I could tell this about Mr. Folwell and the Club, and these are stories, as Paul said, that were told to us by our Father sitting on the front porch or somewhere round the table. He said the men commissioned him, or sent him, to Kentucky to buy horses for the island, they were big hunters. So he thought this was an opportunity so he

went out there and when he ended up he bought some horses for himself too and he bought some for Mr. Pat (?) in Bluffton so he ended up he had a car load of fine, very fine, horses and the stable managers entertained him highly, he said the Kentucky Belles and all came out, and I said, " Well Papa anyone who could buy a car load of horses should be entertained" and as a bonus they threw in a little jack, a little jackass, so he kept the jackass and we had a little island, it has about 5 acres on it adjoining Guerard's Point and we always called it Jackass Island because that is where the jack would pasture and every evening the little jack would come up to the gate, it was fenced off, kinda, and he would come up there waiting to be brought in and fed. Or else, sometimes we would ride him to go after the cattle, he was very gentle.

PAUL: He wanted to raise his own mules.

(MARY) That 's our father. One other thing about Mr. Folwell, I gave a zeroxed copy of the picture of him I have saved of his Christmas card. Every year it would be the same card, his picture dressed in hunting clothes and the old bateau and on the back of it I had written, my Father had probably told me this, that Mr. Folwell was a silk manufacturer and President of this club, Spring Island Club.

PAUL: Then you see he used to meet him at the train station and they bought him a great big buggy that you would have to have 2 horses to pull it and they would meet him and they would come to the point (Guerard's Point) and then the boat would meet them at the back landing and bring them to Spring Island and they did that for years and then they tried to get our father to come to Spring Island and work for them, they wanted him to come and be Superintendent over here but he told them he just could not do it, he had just bought the point but he had a brother who would probably suit them better than he and they said that if he is your brother then we will accept him and that was Pershay Pinckney and so he worked for the club until it broke up, then he worked for Mr. Copp until finally dying and those are his grandchildren here now (deSaussure, Charles and Thomas).

MARY : That was in 1906 that uncle "Shakey" came over here and Mr. Copp did not buy the island until about 1912 so uncle Shakey was here and Mr. Copp kinda bought him along with the island. He worked for Mr. Copp for 35 years.

PAUL : All his life, I don't think he ever did anything else.

MARY) : Until 1940.

Q> Did you come to Spring Island often?

PAUL : Oh yes indeed. During that time, because you see he had a bunch of children raised over here and he had one son about a year older than me, I used to come over here and we used to run around together and of course the only thing I can tell you about that, would be something that would interest teenagers. This was about 1928/27 or 30 along in that and I used to come over here and go hunting and stuff like that. There were plenty of deer, coon, fox and that kind of stuff and they had plenty of horses of course, we had to, we got around on horseback. I remember one horse. My Father brought all these horses for him and the horse was a beautiful horse and his name was Lannigan, we was a five gaited horse and they had a great big black perchant (?) horse they bought to breed, they wanted big horses to pull the plows, this was before they had tractors and my Daddy brought him, his name was Midnight - he was coal black - a great big horse, like the draft horses, Ike Brown was the colored fellow who used to keep the stables and he would bring him down to water and stuff like that and they had big stables which were much larger then because the cow sheds were all tore up and they raised a bunch of black Angus cows over here. Ike Brown used to be in charge - there were two of them in charge of the stables and the cows and the stuff like that, Richard McKenny great big fellow. Well you know I was just young and strapping and I would come over here with my cousin and I would wrestle, ("rassel") I used to like to wrestle, (laughter) and so I wanted to catch old Ike Brown and Ike said, "I ain't going to wrestle, I goin to let you rassel with Richard first so I grabbed hold of Richard and he caught me around the waist and I about throw him over my shoulder and when he got up he was bleeding in his mouth and when he (Ike) saw all that blood he said, "No sir, I am not going to try you again" (laughter) but I rassled with them all, I used to love to "rassle".

Q> Was there a good relationship between the blacks and whites?

PAUL : Oh yes, indeed, absolutely very good, very good. I remember one time when I was here, they used to have parties over here, the black people, and it seems to me like the fellow, the black foreman who used to help my uncle with the farming, but anyhow they had a big party and drinking that corn whisky and stuff I'm sure, they made it themselves but nobody did worry them, you know and they had a fight because there was some from the mainland what come over, ya see, for the party, and they had a fight and one of them colored fellows ripped him open in the stomach and all his intestines fell out on the ground and my uncle then he sent my cousin and I to go and get the phone and call Ridgeland and got Dr. William Ryan who was our cousin again and told him about it and so he came on down and they met him and brought him over here and I remember going to the house and holding the lamp for him to sew him up and he took and washed all his intestines off with water and stuffed them back in and sewed him all up and I remember Uncle Shakey, as we called him, asked Dr. Ryan, "William, how long you feel he has to live", "Oh hell, he says, Pershay he'll be back to work in a couple of weeks", and sure enough he was.

Q : How old were you at this time?

PAUL : I was in my teens, I was about 16, I guess.

Q: Can you remember anything else on the island, what else was growing here?

PAUL : They raised a bunch of cattle, beautiful cattle, black Angus. They planted tomatoes over here one time and shipped them and they were some of the prettiest tomatoes I have ever seen in my life and they grew them from sprouts and planted them all up here.

They had a great big boat, the boat was named Columbia, downstairs of the boat was freight and up above was living and they shipped them tomatoes to Beaufort . The first tractors I saw were over here , they had iron wheels and cleats on them, they were the first tractors I had seen, Mr. Copp had bought two of them. They had big fields but most of the fields are grown up now.

Q: With your association with the black people on the island do you recall any superstitions they may have had?

MARY: Yes , when I would come over and visit my cousin Leonora, who died just about 6 months ago. One of the first things when we would come over here she would take me around to see the blacks, the new babies and everything. Well those were the only people here other than the Smiths, he was a carpenter here.

But first thing we would go and visit the blacks and this story is written up in one of the things I zeroxed for Betsy. Their teacher on the island was Miss Nellie Fripp and the first night or so she was here she heard drums beating and she didn't know what it was and she woke Leonora up who was sleeping in the same room with her and she said, "What in the world is that sound" and Leonora said, "Oh, that's just a message they are sending that somebody died - you know from across in Callawashie and they were sending a message over ".

Some of the things I remember, visiting Leonora often, going to see the black families and their babies. We would go to Beaufort on this beautiful yacht, they had a freight boat and a beautiful yacht and Mr. Copp would go with us and I would say I was about 10 years old and even then I was charmed with this feeling of a Greek God, beautiful blond curly hair, and he was a tremendous man and even to a 10 year old he stood out. He just seemed to be real pleasant fellow and was happy that we were along and paid attention to the children. I remember in the evening, now he had no companionship either other than Uncle Shakey and his family and he loved those children. In the evening he would come down and Aunt Carey and Uncle Shakey and all those children who were really talented in music and have exquisite voices, even today, and Uncle Shakey would play the guitar and Aunt Carey did too and they would sit around the fire and sing and Mr. Copp would be there and enjoyed it so much and I can remember waking up in the morning to music, music was in that home all of the time. The latest thing that came out, those children lived the life of royalty because Mr.

Copp granted their every wish, they were the first ones to have motor boats (right Paul?, "Yeah"), anything that would make them happy.

Q. - Where did they get their education?

MARY (continues) : They had Miss Nellie Fripp, they had to import someone and sometimes they would get (after Nellie Fripp married) then they would have young teachers who had graduated from college they would come over here and some romance would begin to develop. The oldest one, Jim Pinckney, married his teacher.

When we came over here we would spend two or three days over here. Our place at Guerard's Point was not too far and they would always kept a car over at the Fripp,s and sometimes they would come by boat or they would go to the Fripp's and our place was also a central place for them too, they could always come and visit with us so it was sort of back and forth and as we were teenagers, Leonora and those needed social life they would end up and come to visit us. It was a beautiful family they were all very handsome.

If you came over here for the weekend, on Sunday, you could see the boats coming over and they always had lots of company and of course there was no end of the food, Aunt Carey had such a big kitchen and pantry. The oldest one of that family is still living and she is 98 and is in the Bayview Nursing Home and if she is in the right mood she will tell you things, she lives in the present. But, it was a world unto itself on Spring Island everything you could imagine, the latest inventions, the latest of everything was here.

PAUL : It was a wonderful life, you had so much freedom to do what you wanted to. It was a wonderful life for everyone, the best friend the black people had was the whites, don't let nobody tell you otherwise. My Father, he fed them and they all loved him they had what we had. Leon, he grew up with us, he worked in the kitchen and he bring in the wood, we had wood stoves and all, Bertha Mitchell she worked for us and their Mother she was a professional cook and whenever we were going to have special guest s we would get her to come and prepare the meal for us.

MARY: Now Paul, there uncle was Alan Mitchell who was the "Prince"of Callawashie

PAUL: My Daddy raised him.

MARY: I tell you, that breed of Mitchells, I would like to know more about them because they come from a higher class, I mean, Alan was like a "prince".

PAUL: He knew how to manage the rest of them. My Daddy had Callawashie leased so that they had sheep and all that and Alan used to run it for him, because my Daddy raised him and anytime my Father needed help he used to call Alan and he would come and bring all the help he wanted. Like butchering the hogs, he butchered them,

18, 20 hogs because there were plenty mouths to feed, because you had to feed the black people as well.

Q: Did you use a lot of the available seafood?

PAUL and MARY : Oh yes.

MARY: They went fishing and they would always bring us fish.

PAUL: We went fishing and crabbing but we didn't go fishing as much as what you think we did, we would go on occasions. It was too boring for me to sit down so long, I was always on the go.

Q: Did they make any moonshine?

PAUL: Yes indeed. Matter of fact my Daddy made it too, he made it just for his own use, you couldn't buy bottling bond whiskey in those days, he had a good copper still and all, it wasn't unlawful and he made his own whiskey and he put it in a keg and never sold it, he just had it for his guests, and they all of them wanted it, man they loved that whiskey, it was really good corn whiskey doesn't have an odor to it if it is not burned, that odor you smell is the burnt taste to it, cooking it too fast.

My Father was the first man in this part of the country to have artesian wells he had to go to Savannah to the big blacksmith shop and my Father knew the man and he went there and had it drawn out on the paper as to what he wanted to drill for deep water and so he showed it to him and Mr. John Root said, "Mr. Pinckney I can make it but I don't think you are going to find any water down there". Everyone drank surface water.

The water over on Spring Water was good water but they had deep water wells, my Father dug the wells over here and never charged a dime for digging a well.

MARY: He dug 34 wells and never charged them but his motive was to cut down on typhoid fever and things like that.

PAUL : But they made the drill for him and the blacksmith made it for him and give it to him but he made it down to the first rocks he couldn't go no further, so he pulled it up and the drill was dull and beat up on the end so he looked at it and said they had not tempered this drill so he had to catch a horse and buggy and go all the way back through Savannah, a whole day's trip, and he went to Mr. Root and showed him the drill and said the drill worked fine but the blacksmith didn't temper this drill I want it tempered hard, so he called in Joe Torrance ?, the blacksmith, I remember he used to come down to the Point to go fishing - and he said "I'll fix it" and he carried it in the shop and he heated it in the forge and tempered it and sharpened it and I remember him handing it to him and saying "Mr. Pinckney, you can break this drill but I promise

you this, you could never dull it'. And you know, it dug all those wells and it never bruised or dulled it one bit .

MARY : That meant a lot to the community because so many people were sick from the polluted water.

Q : When you came over here to Spring Island would you always see Mr. Copp.

PAUL: No, the many times I had been over here, I only saw him about two or three times.

MARY : We stayed in the area, of course we were the girls so we stayed in the area and didn't venture out too far but every morning I remember Mr. Copp would come down on his horse, and I can remember those leather boots, Uncle Shakey wore those leather boots too because they were out in the woods a lot. But every morning they came and they were going over the Agenda. Mr. Copps loved his home, he loved it here.

PAUL : Mr. Copps got married when he wanted to, I met his wife, she was a banker's wife, she had been married before, great big blond lady. They had no children.

MARY : They had some Pekinese dogs.

PAUL : Yeah, they had some Pekinese dogs. They had wild hogs over here, plenty of them, still probably some of them over here, and my brother had a great big old English bull and they catch ahold of something they will not turn it loose, you have to pry it loose and so Mr. Copp wanted that dog to catch hogs and my brother was much older than me and he said, "Now Mr. Copps you can have the dog but I tell you that dog cannot trail those horses because he will be out of breath, you will have to carry him in the wagon or so and when the other dogs treed the hog then you could let him go and catch him" - he just wanted to catch them he did not want to kill them.

When they come back I asked Ike Mitchell if the dog did catch any of them, "Yes, suh they catch em alright , great guns you know that dog done kill every hog it get". They couldn't get the dog off the hogs, you see they were scared of the dog.

Q - Do you remember any superstitions that the black people would have had, or any medicine they would have used .

PAUL : They used some root that they dug but they wouldn't say much about it to the white folks.

MARY : Paul, don't you remember on our place, I remember boy Fields, he would catch spirits in a jar, he would catch two little frogs in a jar. It would be outside his door and we would ask him what it was for and he would say that is where he caught

the spirits, but, he may have been teasing us you know.

They would use collard leaves if you had a burn. The reason I know this was that my sister had had a terrible burn on her feet and my father was taking her to the doctor and this old colored woman stopped my father and asked how the baby was getting along and she told him that you take linseed oil and carbolic acid and you wash it off with that and then you beat up a collard leaf and put over that and my Father did that and he said there was never a problem after that.

They had suspicions like, that if the baby had hiccups you would get some cobwebs and put it on their head and take a straw out of the broom and make a cross out of it and put it on the forehead and the hiccups would stop. Sooner or later.

Q : How about when they had a fever?

MARY : I do know this, that one of our little brothers, Paul knows this, his name was Feurard, we were related to the Guerards too and when he was a year and a half old he had colitis and we had him under a doctor and the doctor was prescribing medicine, medicine, medicine and Patty Brown's little girl Nancy - they worked on our place and the little girl had colitis at the same time. They took her to a doctor who was a naturalist Miss Gilford in Bluffton and she prescribed a different treatment to keep rice gruel in her stomach. Our little brother died, he just went down and down, but Nancy lived and is still alive today.

One other thing I was thinking about, the black folks on the point used to get together for parties and they used to call them "Shouts", they had them usually on the weekend and they were very musical, they had guitars and we would get them to play for our parties as well and we would go down there and watch them and we would give them refreshments and they would be dancing just like they are dancing today, you did not need a partner you just stood up there and danced in front of each other. They did not resent us coming at all, they wanted us to come. We participated in their weddings and everything.

We just thought there dancing was the best entertainment in the world, we just loved to go to those shouts.

PAUL : You know you take them Mitchells, the two Mitchell boys, both of them worked for us at Guerard's Point but Leon, we were playing one time right off of the big barn of ours and it was a colored fellow had a little small horse and I think Leon told him, hey, "Lookit Paul, let me show you something", so he got down on all fours and he sneaked up behind that horse while he was eating grass. I didn't know what he was going to do and he went there and pinched that horse on the hooflock, well that horse "bamm" hit him on the forehead and you will see that scar on his forehead, you ask him what caused that, the horse's name was Francena, belonged to a colored preacher. Well that blood started to shooting out like that. Well some cousins of

mine we were playing out there with Benny and Leon on a Sunday and I had heard you could put cobwebs on that thing and stop it so we were near that barn and there were plenty of cobwebs and stuff and I got me a handful of cobwebs and pressed it down hard and held it and it finally stopped but he was bloody all over his face and all and when his Grandfather came and find out about it, one of the others went down and told them about it, he got that boy and he raised cane about it about him getting hurt and all because the boy could have gotten himself killed but you look at Leon and you will see the scar. You ask him.

Leon used to work in the kitchen most of the time for us. (Mary) "He was a skinny little fellow">

MARY : You asked about their religion. They had a house, it was in Pinckney Colony, and they would go there to have their religious services. Sometimes we would have blacks at our church in the Colony.

You know we always felt safe we could go anywhere, we had no fear at all and they (the blacks) would look after us, they really would. I remember when our house burned Frank Brown I was trying to help salvaging and he came up to me and said, "Now you just go over there and watch those things that they don't disappear and we will do the fighting". We had a lot of good friends. They were all so glad to see us. I hadn't seen Leon since he was a little skinny boy, gosh it was wonderful.

Q - Did you go inside the Copp House?

Mary : I did not.

PAUL : I went in their one time, for some occasion, I don't know, I went with my cousin. That was a great big home but they had another house down there at Goose Pond, they built that pond and they asked for Daddy and they had the engineers come here and they spent a lot of money on it and they built it for ducks. (Q> This was done by Mr. Copp?) No, it was done for the Hunt Club so right away they sent for Daddy to come and take a look at it. Daddy looked down and said "You done some beautiful work there but that thing ain't going to stay" and they said "What you mean?" "Well the first spring tide you have and the wind come from a certain direction it going to tear it all to pieces". Well it didn't take much wind but it washed that thing out in no time. But there is a house down there in Goose Pond.

I went down there and spent the night with one of my cousins who was in charge of the hogs they raised down here, they had a big hog farm and he was in charge of that, the others they did carpenter work and so-and-so but Devant didn't do nothing, they babied him. He didn't do nothing but played the guitar, he had a good life. He sang one time on the radio and they tried to sign him up but he wouldn't do it

MARY : Oh, he had a gorgeous voice. If they had gone out for TV they would have

been stars.

PAUL : Now you take that same cousin of mine, he was going with this little girl and was going to get married and we were double dating see, and so that day we said we were going to carry him to Ridgeland to get him married by the appropriate judge. He was sort of shy you know so I woke up the judge at about eleven o'clock at night and told the judge I had someone who wanted to get married and the judge said, "Well bring him on in", so I went back out to get him and he told me, "Paul, let me tell you something, hell, I don't think I can do that again, man you know I am going to get myself in a bunch of trouble I done been married" and I said, "Well Devant, I done waked up this judge, somebody got to go and get married tonight" and so I goes in there and get married to my girl"

Q : Is there anything else you can remember about Spring Island?

MARY : Coming over here, like I said, it was "another world" and your eyes were just popping, you didn't know what you were going to see.

PAUL : There used to be orange trees over here and those orange trees did have no seed in them, where they come from I don't know about that.

MARY : They used to have fruit trees over here, lemons, oranges and grapefruit. I think Uncle Shakey planted those because they were around his house. But I can picture now, if we were coming over here Uncle Shakey would be around, but when you left there would always be Uncle Shakey and them dogs and he would be standing on the dock waving you goodbye, they were so hospitable all of them. This was just a wonderful place to come.

This is a little genealogy on the Pinckneys. Pershay Pinckney married his first cousin, Caroline Webster Pershay and her father and Pershay Pinckney's Mother were brother and sister, they were first cousins. Aunt Carey and her Grandfather, who was a Devant, was mayor of Savannah. Her sister who was Mattie married Miles McSweeney who was Governor of South Carolina.

When Aunt Carey learned about Mr. Copp's mistresses and friends, she did not approve of that at all, she was very cordial to Mr. Copp beforehand and invite him in and he knew he had a place around the fire and they would sing in the evenings and the family enjoyed him very much but she did not approve of his way of life and she thought he should get married so she had it understood that he would not come back and sit around in the family circle. But that did not hurt the relationships between Mr. Copp and my uncle or the children.

PAUL : Everybody knew about it (Mr. Copp's relationships) but they didn't do anything about it, there was no disturbance about it.

MARY : There was just one black woman, it was very private.

PAUL : Her name was Patty Austin and she had a brother, Mr. Copp sent him off to get his captain's license to run the boat and his name was Johnnie Austin.

MARY : Regarding their education, Leonora went off to a girls school, a very fine finishing school (Fasifern??) in Hendersonville, North Carolina and I know Miles (her brother) had a business course in Savannah and went to a military school for a while, I'm not sure which one it was. They had a tutor over here who lived with them and had school in one of the little houses.

If they had a problem getting a teacher over here they would go and stay with our Grandparents who lived in Pinckney Colony and would go to our little school. My Daddy hired a teacher, Dick Churn, he was a graduate of Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. He was remarkable, he was a lawyer and we just had a wonderful relationship with him. He stayed in our home.

Interviewed by Beryl LaMotte