

Beaufort County African American Heritage Time Line

1525 -- First arrival. Spanish explorer Ayllon brings a few enslaved Africans to the South Carolina coast. The attempt to build a colony fails. Before the survivors leave, some Africans may have escaped and then intermarried with Native Americans in the area.

1730-39 -- About 20,000 enslaved Africans are brought to the state. Enslaved people resist in a wide range of ways, from acting lazy, stupid, or breaking tools in order to minimize the work that is being forced upon them, to theft, running away, and even individual violent resistance.

1861 -- Union forces take control of the Sea Islands. Enslaved African-Americans flee to the area where Union troops consider blacks to be free because they are the "contraband of war." That is, they were the property of the enemy which is forfeited. Formal freedom comes more than a year later with the Emancipation Proclamation.

1862 (April)- A military order freeing blacks in the sea island: four months later President Lincoln developed his own plan of emancipation - officially making the "contraband slaves" freedmen.

1862 (May 12) -- Robert Smalls sails *The Planter* through Confederate lines and delivers it and its cargo to Union forces off the South Carolina coast. He volunteers to help the Union Navy guide its ships through the dangerous South Carolina coastal waters for the rest of the war.

1862 Gen. Ormsby Mitchell organized the town of Mitchelville for slaves – at that time referred to as contrabands of war. It is known as the first freedman's village. In this experiment, Mitchelville residents elected their own town officials, developed and passed their own laws and established the first compulsory education law in the state.

1862 -- Two Northern missionaries create the Penn School on St. Helens Island after the Union captures the area and thousands of former enslaved people flee to safety there. The school survives as the Penn Center, serving as a conference center for the civil rights movement and a center for self-help and historical preservation today.

-- The First Regiment of South Carolina Volunteers is formed. African-Americans in the Sea Islands area volunteer for the first black unit to fight in the war as part of a Union experiment. The unit proves to be a great success. Throughout the war over 5,400 South Carolina African-Americans serve in the Union Army. They are a small but important part of the 200,000 African-Americans from all over America who serve in the Union Army and fight in over 400 different engagements.

1864 -- Spirituals. The *Atlantic Monthly* publishes a collection of African-American spiritual hymns collected by Charlotte Forten, a free African-American from the North who comes to live and teach on St. Helena Island.

1865 --President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing slaves. This document is read on St. Helena Island.

1865 -- New Constitution and Black Codes. Following the war, white South Carolinians rewrite the state constitution in order to return to the union. They restrict the right to vote and elect an all-white legislature that then passes the "Black Codes," which restrict rights of the newly freed people. Congress responds by passing the Reconstruction Acts, which require that the state rewrite the Constitution. African-Americans participate under federal military supervision.

1865- The First African Baptist Church is founded on Hilton Head Island, becoming the first African American Baptist Church on Hilton Head Island.

1868-Rachel Crane Mather started a school in Beaufort for daughters of freed slaves. In 1882, it becomes a normal school for black girls. The school has evolved into the present-day Technical College of the Lowcountry.

1869 --Joseph Rainey becomes the first African-American in South Carolina to become a U.S. Representative in Congress. He is followed by seven others before African-Americans are driven out of elected office: Robert C. DeLarge, Robert Brown Elliott, Richard H. Cain, Alonzo Ransier, Robert Smalls, Thomas E. Miller, and George W. Murray.

1904 -- The Penn School begins teaching the African craft of basket making, which had once been a vital part of the rice culture.

1911 -- Former Civil War hero and Reconstruction politician Robert Smalls foils a lynch mob by spreading rumors that Charleston would be burned if the jailed African-Americans are harmed.

1963 -- Civil rights leader, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. came to Penn Center to plan the March on Washington.

1970 -- Beaufort County native "Smokin'" Joe Frazier beats Muhammad Ali for the world heavyweight boxing title in one of the best matches of all time. In 1964 he had been the first American to win the heavyweight gold medal Olympic match.

1970 --Thomas C. Barnwell Jr. organizes the Beaufort-Jasper Comprehensive Health Clinic to provide healthcare for the area's poor African American residents. The federally- funded clinic now has five other sites, including a clinic in Hampton County.

1972-Teacher and author Pat Conroy publishes *The Water is Wide*, which detailed the racism and appalling conditions he witnessed while teaching black, underprivileged children in a one-room schoolhouse on Daufuskie Island. The book won Conroy a humanitarian award from the National Education Association and was made into the feature film *Conrack*, starring Jon Voight. The movie, *The Water is Wide*, premiered as a Hallmark Hall of Fame feature film in February 2006, starring Alfre Woodard and Jeff Hephner.

1986-The Annual Penn Center Heritage Days Celebration is started to celebrate and showcase the unique cultural heritage of the Gullah people of the Sea Islands. It is held every second weekend in November.

1987-Beaufort native Rosalie Pazant organizes the Beaufort Gullah Festival to celebrate the county's Gullah heritage.

1997-The Native Island Business and Community Affairs Association, which provides business loans and leadership training, starts the Gullah Celebration on Hilton Head to recognize the local culture.