

On December 12, 2009, the good people of Yemassee held their first-ever tour of homes – the Yemassee Town and Country Holiday Home Tour. I purchased tickets the minute I heard about it.



In fact I bought four tour tickets, along with four tickets for a casual shrimp and grits lunch at Richfield Plantation. I knew this was something special, and that many Lowcountry history buffs, and lovers of shrimp and grits, would come out of the woodwork for this event. I wanted to make sure me and mine had tickets in hand.

It was a good thing that we got our tickets early because the tour eventually sold out. If we'd waited for the day of the event we'd have been out of luck.

Who ever knew that Yemassee had such a loyal following?

And with good reason. Yemassee is a little town with a big history. So big, in fact, that it's got its own war -- the Yemassee War. What other town in South Carolina can make that claim?

The tale of the Yemassee Indians and the war they fought against British colonists is interesting, but I'll have to save that for another column. For now just remember that the Yemassee War started on Good Friday in 1715 in Pocotaligo, that there were tremendous geopolitical ramifications particularly regarding the Spanish and French, and that as a result of the war the arc of our nation's history was forever changed.

As far as early histories go, Yemassee's is compelling.

What's left to see today? Because of the ravages of time, and the savagery of Sherman's army, there is very little left of the material culture of Yemassee's 18th century and early 19th century history. Houses were burned. Churches were dismantled. Stuff got stolen. The usual story of

the Southland.

Of the churches that were left standing, many were used as hospitals, which when you think about it is pretty gross. According to the tour brochure, there are still Civil War-era bloodstains on the floorboards of the Stoney Creek Presbyterian Church. I meant to look for them when I was in there, but forgot about it. I was too busy enjoying the tranquility of the place.

Of all the structures in the Yemassee tour, Stoney Creek was the oldest. It was built for use as a summer chapel in 1832. That's old, for the United States at least.

Having been raised in Stoney Creek's caretaker church, First Presbyterian of Beaufort, I'd been at the site plenty of times. The Presbyterians make semi-annual pilgrimages out to the old church, and these pilgrimages usually involve having a worship service followed by a big covered dish lunch on the lawn.

On those pilgrimage days -- Stoney Creek Sundays, they're called -- the church has always looked pretty. Or at least it has ever since some of the guys did some renovation work and gave it a decent paint job. But on the day of the Yemassee tour it seemed especially graceful-looking.

I couldn't figure out what the difference was. Then my Mom piped up: "I've never seen it like this -- usually when we get here the yard is full of lawn chairs and coolers!"

Seems that when we make the annual pilgrimage, we kind of junk up the place.

So if you want to appreciate the serene beauty of Stoney Creek Church, best to do it during a tour. You miss out on the covered dish lunch, but then life is full of little trade-offs, isn't it?

One of the other sacred places on the tour, a chapel belonging to the Prince William Parish Episcopal Church, was built in 1898. It's in the McPhersonville area, just down the road from Stoney Creek. However the original Episcopal structure was built in 1831, which would have

made it one year older than the Presbyterian one.

Unfortunately, the original Episcopalian structure is no longer there because of ... you know who. Starts with an S.

But surprise, surprise: the Union army didn't burn it. Prince William's is one of those churches whose timbers were cannibalized to make a bridge across the Combahee River. So at least the church was sacrificed to what was ultimately a worthy cause, and not just reduced to ashes.

A third sacred site, Ebenezer United Methodist Church, had a similar woeful tale. It was built in 1840, but alas, was not long for this world. It shared the same fate as Prince William's chapel -- its timbers ended up as part of a Combahee River bridge, too.

According to a short history distributed at Ebenezer, the congregation was eventually compensated by the U.S. government for the destruction of their church. They got only \$1800, and it took the proverbial Act of Congress to make it happen, but at least they got some restitution.

So they built a new little chapel after the war, but that little chapel was eventually dismantled and moved so it could serve as a parsonage next to a newer sanctuary.

I say new-er, because the new sanctuary was not new-new, just new to them.

This newer sanctuary -- the one on the Yemassee tour -- was actually an old one built in 1877. It started out, in a different location, as All Saints Episcopal Church.

In 1910 it was purchased by the Methodists. Then in 1915 the Methodists took it apart. Very methodically, of course. They transported all the pieces by wagon to the current site and put it all back together, again very methodically. It helped that it was all pegged so they didn't have to deal with nails.

Enough with the churches. In the next column I'll write about some of the houses that were on the tour. But before I close let me point out something, because I see a pattern here. And no, it's not that Yemassee has a great tradition of dismantling buildings and hauling stuff all over the place, although there was sure a lot of that going on.

What Yemassee has is a history of taking what they've got on hand and reworking it in creative ways to suit their current needs. So it's only fitting that the proceeds from the tour went to the Yemassee Revitalization Corporation, which is raising money to renovate the old train station.

The interpretation of the Yemassee's history is still in its infancy, but not for long. The community is coming together to share their stories with the rest of us, and next time I'll share some more of those stories with you.

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