

A Revolutionary Story of Intrigue Hilton Head Island, SC

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One thousand miles from home, under a canopy of live oaks veiled in Spanish moss, I found myself face to face with a Revolutionary War story in the Low Country. It seems no matter where UELs travel, our history finds us.

January 1, 2010 the beginning of a new year, we hit the road for a week's vacation on Hilton Head Island in South Carolina. Our first morning there, I picked up the Island Packet and read from the front page in bold print, "Rescuing history - Island group wants to make forgotten cemetery accessible to tourists." That was enough to stir my interest and make my day.



Zion Cemetery, Hilton Head Island SC

I learned from the newspaper article that the Heritage Library Foundation is proposing a history park using a Revolutionary War-era cemetery and an early 1800s mausoleum as the centerpiece of the project.

In 1788, The Zion Chapel of Ease, a small wooden Episcopal church for plantation owners, was constructed on this site. Later interments in the cemetery included members of some of the island's

leading families - Baynards, Kirks and Stoneys. The Baynard mausoleum built in 1846 is the oldest intact structure on the island.



Baynard Mausoleum built in 1846, Zion Cemetery

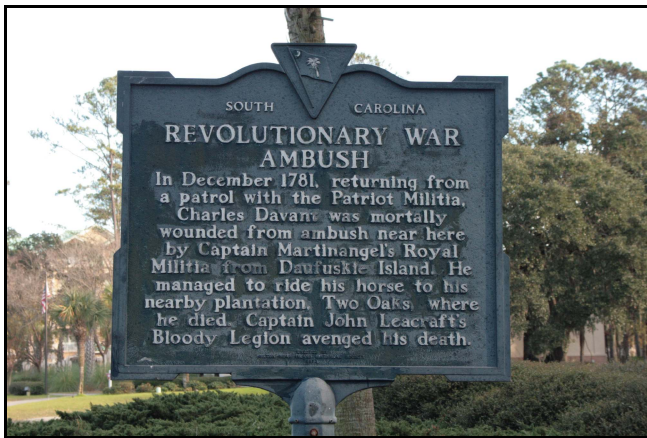
The story got better. In 1781 an ambush took place on the site ending in the murder of patriot land owner Ambrose Davant. During the Revolution, Hilton Head Islanders supported the rebels while nearby Daufuskie Island was the home of Loyalists to King George III and England.

A marker atop the Harbour Town Lighthouse on Hilton Head Island points out the stretch of water less than a mile wide, where the 'Row Boat' wars took place during the American Revolution. The two sides became involved in deadly naval assaults and skirmishes as islanders rowed across the sound at night to raid homes and storehouses.

"It was the Daufuskie Island Royal Militia versus the Blood Legion of South Carolina on Hilton Head. The latter would launch raids on 'Little Bermuda', as it was derisively called, which would retaliate in kind."¹

On a fateful night in December of 1781, Loyalists from Daufuskie rowed to Hilton Head and lay in wait for Ambrose Davant in the woods near the historic cemetery site. He was shot by Captain Martinangel's Royal Militia of Daufuskie Island.

¹<http://www.hiltonhead360.com/Real-Estate-Guide/Daufuskie-Island.html>



According to reports, Captain Davant, mortally wounded, was able to ride to his plantation 'Two Oaks' where he collapsed into the arms of his comrade, Captain John Leacraft. His dying words were, "Get Martinangel".

One telling of the story reveals that, "the following night Captain Leacraft quietly led a patrol, hand picked from his "Bloody Legion", to Daufuskie. Once on the island they crept, unnoticed, into the home of Martinangel, where they found the Loyalist asleep, with his infant daughter beside him. Without a sound, the men cut Captain Martinangel's throat, killing him almost instantly. Nestled in the soft feather mattress; the child almost drowned in her father's blood before her cries were heard, and she was rescued by servants. That child lived to adulthood, and through inheritance and shrewd business practices, eventually owned nearly every cotton and indigo plantation on Daufuskie Island.

Captain Davant's remains were laid to rest in Zion Cemetery, now located at the corner of Mathews Drive and William Hilton Parkway, where his tombstone is inscribed with the name of his killer and his avenger."²

Who could have known more than 200 years later a Loyalist descendant from Ontario would stand on this very ground and learn of the tragic circumstances surrounding these deaths?

As the Island Packet newspaper article indicated, "Most people pay little attention to the place that was

once at the epicenter of Hilton Head social life in the 18th and early 19th centuries."

The Heritage Library Foundation is working to preserve the early history of Hilton Head and thanks to its initiative, an intriguing Loyalist story was revealed to me in the shaded grove of a neglected cemetery many miles from home.



Charles Davant, Revolutionary Soldier 1750 - 1781

Further research into Loyalist activity in the South reveals that the greatest forced march of the Revolution took place in 1779 when British troops left Daufuskie Island to aid in the defense of Savannah, Georgia. Savannah was held by the British until 1782 and at the end of the war on leaving Savannah, many Loyalist families sailed for Jamaica.

Our stay in Hilton Head SC included a day trip to Savannah, Georgia where I stood on the site of the October 9, 1779 assault at the Spring Hill Redoubt - the line of entrenchments built by the British around Savannah. Repeated assaults against the British were made by the allied troops of Georgia, South Carolina and France from September 16 to October 18, 1779. The siege at Spring Hill Redoubt, considered one of the bloodiest engagements of the Revolutionary war, left Savannah in British hands until 1782.

²<http://www.hiltonheadhotline.com/article-get-martinangel.php>