

Early American Furnishings

A piece of history in your home

AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF HEART PINE AND THE PINOPOLIS POST OFFICE

In 1834, Dr. Porcher and Dr. Morton Waring built the first of two houses in what is today Pinopolis, South Carolina. In his diary, Dr. Porcher states that he and Dr. Waring wanted to build houses for themselves in a pine land about four miles south of his plantation in Somerton. For the sake of jest, he dated several letters "Pinopolis, SC" and this became the name of the village. By 1844, records indicate there were about a dozen homes in the area.

The Woodboo summer house, likely built by Stephen Mazyck, was moved to Pinopolis in 1846. This home was originally owned by the Porcher family and then purchased by the Ravenel family in 1857. To accompany the summer house and her guests, a small lodge was constructed aside the main dwelling. Records indicate the construction of this small structure was prior to 1857. By the latter part of the 19th century, the residents needed to receive regular postal service, and the front room of the building became the official Post Office on May 16, 1894. In a letter from Emily Guerard Ravenel, she indicates that the Post Office building also served as a schoolroom and residence for Mr. Stephen De Veaux. *

The Ravenels extended gracious hospitality to many noted visitors through the years. One was the poet, historian and writer of many novels of history and fiction, William Gilmore Simms (1806-1870), who consulted with Mr. Ravenel on some of the historical facts for his novels laid in the local areas. During his lifetime, Mr. Ravenel kept a daily record of temperatures and rainfall. It was thought this was a continuation of records started by his father. However, after his death, it was continued by his daughter "Miss Bessie," and after her death, by another Ravenel daughter, Mrs. L.S. Lucas. This was continued until about 1944. The U.S. Government was interested in this long and accurate record and asked permission to incorporate it into their records.

Mr. Ravenel left the house to Miss Elizabeth Ravenel and Miss Margaret Deas Ravenel. Elizabeth was affectionately known to all as Miss Bessie. Miss Bessie lived in the house and was the first Postmaster for the post office, remaining so until her death in 1935. It was a gathering place for the village women in the morning to exchange plans, gossip, news of the latest baby, and things of interest to the ladies of the day. During World War I, it also served as a place for the ladies of Pinopolis to make bandages, knit socks and mufflers, and make other needs for the soldiers. Miss Bessie ran the post office as she wanted, and paid no heed to directives from Washington. Customers were allowed to charge stamps and pay for them when able. She was well respected and as such, likely never lost a penny. In 1975, the United States Post Office Department decided the facilities should be modernized, and the old post office building was put out of service. This beautiful heart pine furnishing was made from wood that was recovered when the building was renovated in 2007.

Longleaf Heart Pine is a diminishing resource. The southern lowland forest is home to this specie but unfortunately the entire area was logged out by the close of the 19th century. Due to a slow growth cycle, the specie has not been replanted on a large scale as has been done with the Loblolly variety. In addition, the way that second and third growth pines grow today is quite different from how the old growth forest matured. It is a common misunderstanding that the southern lowland forest is strictly a pine forest. It may appear that way as one drives down the back roads through hundreds of miles of Loblolly Pines, but the old growth forest had a rich diversity of deciduous trees as well. The Longleaf had to compete for nutrients and sunlight under the shade of other enormous species such as the Live Oak. This condition, coupled with the already slow growth cycle, produced a very tight-grained tree with an extremely high amount of pitch or resin. Not only was the timber considered extremely valuable, but this pitch had numerous uses as well. Many old loggers can tell tales of trees that have a "Cat Face" cut into them. This process involved cutting the bark off a spot in the tree and attaching a small "L"-shaped piece of tin on an angle with a bucket at the end. The tree would bleed the thick resin from this spot, and when the bucket was full it was taken to be processed into valuable turpentine.

"Heart Pine," as it is referred to today, could mean many different grades of material, but it would all come from the Longleaf variety. The highest grade of the material is reclaimed old growth. The reason is that as the timber has aged as part of a structure, the resin begins to darken, producing the rich red color that is not found in any other specie. Notice in this piece that the winter growth (the darker color) is almost translucent like a precious stone. Enjoy this link to our past and tell this history to family and friends.

Written by W. Lee Tigner Jr.

Craftsman of Fine, Reclaimed Heart Pine Furnishings



The restored Pinopolis Post Office as it appeared after restoration in 2007.



* This brief history comes from *Plantations, Pineland Villages, Pinopolis and Its People* by Norman Walsh, as well as *Pinopolis History of a Pineland Village* by Anne S. Ball.