



How an Island Neighborhood Got Its Name

The land on the southwest side of St. Simons Island, bordering the Frederica River, has been identified by many names through the years: Hamilton Plantation, Gascoigne Bluff, Epworth By The Sea. But the moniker that draws the most questions is Jewtown. With no temple on St. Simons and only a small Jewish population in Glynn County, how did Jewtown get its name?

The story begins with the construction of the lumber mills at Gascoigne Bluff. With the collapse of the plantation economy after the Civil War and the abolishment of slavery, land and labor were available for new enterprises in Coastal Georgia. Worldwide demand for lumber attracted investors to this

area, and the business of processing Georgia longleaf (yellow pine) revitalized the economy.

The Georgia Land and Lumber Company of New York bought the Hamilton cotton plantation at Gascoigne Bluff in 1875 and built lumber mills there. Empty plantation buildings became offices, boarding houses and stores. The mills provided jobs for both African American and white families, with opportunities to work at or around the mills.

Among the families who benefited from the mills were the Levisons. Sig and Robert Levison built a general merchandise store about a mile east of Gascoigne Bluff to serve the mill workers. As more people began working in the area, houses were built around the store. The Levisons called the new

neighborhood "Levisonton." The name was not adopted by locals, however, who substituted the name of the Levisons' faith. The neighborhood was thus called "Jewtown."

Although the mills and the Levisons' store are long gone, that part of the Island is still referred to as Jewtown. It is one of the three historic African American neighborhoods on the Island, along with Harrington and South End. As for the Levisons, they became prominent Brunswick citizens who served in the city's government and were among the original congregation of historic Temple Beth Tefilloh, established in 1886.

This month's image of an unidentified home in Jewtown is from a hand-colored glass lantern slide in the Society's Margaret Davis Cate Collection.

Our monthly images on this page are from the vast archives of the Coastal Georgia Historical Society. The Society's mission includes the "administration, restoration and maintenance of historic facilities and resources ... preserved as a living part of the historical and cultural foundations of our coastal community." Society facilities include the St. Simons Lighthouse and Museum, the A.W. Jones Heritage Center, and the Maritime Center (formerly the U.S. Coast Guard Station). To learn more about the Society, its diverse programs, and the benefits of Society membership, please call (912) 638.4666, or visit www.saintsimonslighthouse.org.