



What's in a Name? Adding an "s" to St. Simon

Our community's streets, neighborhoods, and parks often pay homage to the names given to the region by Native Americans or Spanish and English explorers and settlers: Altamaha, Guale, Asao, Tolomato, Gascoigne, Frederica. Even St. Simons derives from anglicizing the Spanish name of a 17th century settlement on the largest of Georgia's Golden Isles. The island's name, however, has not stayed the same throughout history, with the final version officially being designated as late as 1943.

The United States Geological Survey (USGS) in a detailed record lists various names for the island. Maps from 1737 through 1925 indicate the following variations, all using the abbreviation for "Saint": Great St. Simon's Isle, St. Simon's Island, St. Simon Island, St. Simons Island, and even St. Symons Island.

The two names that the USGS would eventually choose between were Saint Simon Island and Saint Simons Island, with "Saint" spelled out and one "s" being the difference. In 1891 the USGS Board on Geographic Names declared that the island was to be called

Saint Simon Island. However, by the 1930s it was apparent that local residents used "Simons" with an "s" as part of their common naming conventions.

The USGS Board was convened again in 1938 to revisit the "s" issue. Their decision report included the comments of Mrs. Edwin Fendig, then President of the Cassina Garden Club, which had been submitted to the Post Office Department: "Aside from the fact that it has always been known as St. Simons, the present residents and property owners still prefer that name. We feel that,

after all, the name of a place is most vital to the people who live in that place, and that their choice and preference should be given first consideration." In spite of Mrs. Fendig's statement, the Board decided to leave off the "s."

A mere five years later in 1943, the Board reversed their decision. The official name has been Saint Simons Island ever since, though "St." is commonly used. This month's image is a detail from an 1892 USGS map in the archives of Coastal Georgia Historical Society, showing the use of "Simon" between 1891 and 1943.