



BRAD NETTLES/STAFF

Jack Kornahrens, who manages the land and hunting lease of The Ponds, explains the history of Schulz Lake in Dorchester County.

the lake.

They were armed well enough that a 1732 inventory of The Ponds estate included 30 old muskets and five carriage guns, likely left over from the war. Their leader had the incongruous name of Capt. George Chicken. Not so incongruously, Chicken was a British trade agent.

The tribes had killed some 100 settlers and torched the settled lands south of the Stono River. That uprising doesn't seem to have gotten as far north as Dorchester, noted historian Henry A.M. Smith wrote in *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* in 1905.

"But an invasion of the Indians to the northward, which took place at the same time, was more threatening," he wrote.

Smith reported that Chicken and the militia fought the northern invasion "at a place styled in the old accounts 'The Ponds.'" The militia defeated them decisively, Smith wrote, but he gave no details. The battle virtually ended the Indian threat in the colony.

WILD AZALEAS

The Ponds as granted to Percival was a 2,000-acre spread across both banks of the swamp, essentially surrounding Schulz Lake. As it passed estate to estate, tracts were bought and sold, divided and redivided.

So it's surprising that today the Simmons own 2,000 acres with a

boundary roughly resembling the original.

They are among the most recent of any number of families to have owned a chunk of the land. They were preceded by the Schulzes, for whom the lake is named.

Among the 18th century owners was William Henry Drayton, who raised racing horses at The Ponds and mortgaged it repeatedly to pay other debts, and whose radical political views were dismissed as ravings, according to historical account.

Ralph Simmons grew up spending weekends on the land his grandfather bought in 1911 to farm.

His father, also Ralph Simmons, grew sweet potatoes successfully enough that older people in the Summerville community talk of hearing the stories of the overflowing potato wagons clogging in to town to the railroad.

About that time the lake was a deep-woods haunt of Summerville youth. The late David Bell, in his privately published book "Reflections On the Ashley," talks about camping at the lake as a Boy Scout and "striking," or smacking the water next to a fish with a rod and netting the stunned fish.

"Well, one time after striking we had a real big 'mess of fish' on stringers out in the water," he wrote. "We had gone to bed when we heard all this splashing and carrying on, so we got up and went

down to the edge of the lake. We found a bunch of snakes trying to eat our fish. The water splashing and the fish scales and snake eyes shining are still in my mind."

The Scouts brought along their .22-caliber rifles to kill off cottonmouths, which would level their heads and fix their eyes on the rifle barrel as it was pointed at them.

Simmons raised cattle on the property in the 1950s, but more recently it's been managed for hunting and fishing as a family treasure. He talks about the abundance of wild azaleas he used to pick and carry home to his mother.

The family has always known the property had history. They've found Colonial and American Indian artifact shards.

In 1989, Hurricane Hugo decimated the high bluff woods, and the family began to talk about what to do with the land. In 1997, with interest stirred in the celebration of the Dorchester County centennial, the family commissioned a history-rich title search.

The plantation house is long gone, suggested to have been burned during the Civil War by Union troops on their way to the Edisto Road across the swamp.

An archaeological survey found no more than scattered artifacts at that and other sites. There's little left of the past except the swamp.

In 2000, the family drew up an

ecological assessment and management plan that recommended a controlled burn regimen to restore the plant life the land once had.

"We want to get it back to what it looked like prior to 1682," Simmons said.

The plan also suggests amenities such as four canoe trails, two woods trails, a rice field and a swamp trail. The family has dug two 20-acre ponds at one of the upland sites torn up by Hugo, part of the one-third of the property that the plan suggests could be developed. It's part of the overall strategy to enhance the property while looking at its long-range options, Simmons said.

"You always have to think about developing," he said, but the family has no immediate plans.

The swamp environs are still primeval enough that Simmons likes to use the word "pristine," and Kornahrens shudders describing the size of some of the snapping turtles in Schulz Lake. Two hunt club members who are scuba divers won't set flipper in the water. Bald eagles fish the lake.

"And if you were traveling down (U.S. 17A just downstream), you wouldn't know it was back here," Kornahrens said.

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