



The Honorable Hastings Gantt: 50 Acres & A School

Hastings Gantt, shown here near Penn School in 1907, was born near Edisto Island, South Carolina in approximately 1830 to Hannah and Joe Gantt. In 1862, during The Civil War, Union troops retook possession of the area around Port Royal Sound and surrounding Sea Islands. As a result, thousands of enslaved people, including Gantt, became free.

By 1864, Gantt had met Penn School founders Laura Towne and Ellen Murray. By 1866, Gantt was a landowner and civic leader on Saint Helena Island, including being an Advisory Committee Member to the Beaufort branch of the Freedmen's Savings Bank. In 1870, he was elected as a Representative of Beaufort County to the South Carolina General Assembly, and he served multiple terms until 1883.

Gantt's life was interwoven with the story and success of the Penn School. By 1902, and until his death around 1910, Gantt sold and possibly donated land so that the Penn School, now known as the Penn Center, could expand its campus and secure its future.

A presentation of ongoing research by Pure+Applied in conjunction with and to benefit Penn Center, 2022

c. 1866



Penn School was founded by Laura Towne and Ellen Murray in 1862. In 1866, a new school building was erected across the road from Brick Church (visible at right) where classes were held prior. Photo: Library of Congress.

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1865



S. C., November 1865.

To Major General O. O. Howard,

Commissioner of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands:

We, the Loyal People of the State of South Carolina, do earnestly but respectfully remonstrate with you, as the recognized agent of the Government, against the proposed restoration of the **Island Lands** of this State to the original owners, as an act which will stand in open and flagrant violation of the **plighted faith** of the United States Government, as declared in certain acts of Congress approved July 2d, 1862, and March 3d, 1863, and referred to in General Orders No. 9, issued by yourself, and in words following, to wit: "The pardon of the President will not be understood to extend to the surrender of abandoned or confiscated property which by law has been 'set apart for Refugees and Freedmen,' or in use for the 'employment and general welfare of all persons within the lines of National Military occupation within said Insurrectionary States, formerly held as slaves, who are or shall become free.'"

We therefore solemnly protest against the proposed restoration of said Lands as, under existing circumstances, an act of governmental injustice which would stand without a parallel in the annals of civilized nations—an act also which must bring unspeakable suffering and woe upon thousands who will thus be cruelly disappointed in their hopes, thrust out of their homes in poverty, and made dependent upon the cold charity of those, mainly, through whose oppression and blind infatuation in the past, we owe our present unhappy condition; and we earnestly pray that you will stay your hand, and refuse to carry into execution a measure so manifestly cruel and injudicious, if not even dangerous.

Names.

Ismael Moultrie

Names.

Henry Bram

Cyrus Frason

Hastings Gantt

Harvey Mack

William Pope

Otto Morris

Charles Green

Joshua Jenkins

Monday McNeal

Peter Right



On a petition to Major General O. O. Howard, Hastings Gantt is a signatory protesting President Andrew Johnson's Circular #13 which would have allowed the return of land ownership to the Confederate rebels.

INDEX TO DEEDS, BEAUFORT COUNTY, S. C.—CROSS

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YEAR	GRANTEES				GRANTORS	Kind of Instrument	Book	Page	REMARKS
	SURNAMES	GIVEN NAMES ABCDEFGH	GIVEN NAMES IJKLMNO	GIVEN NAMES PQRSTUWXYZ					
1866	Grant al			William Comm	John S Smallwood	Deed	A	18	St H
do	do	Hastings			Edward S Philbrick	Q C D	B	230	St H
1868	do			Richard	James G Thompson	Q C D	2	495	St H
1870	do			Isaac (Col)	U S	Cert	4	152	Bft
1871	do			John	J Stoddard al	Deed	5	450	----
1872	do			Simon C	R F Bythewood	Deed	5	686	Bft
1874	do			May	Mary C Wilkins al	Deed	8	467	Yemassee
do	do	Hammond			Mary C Wilkins al	Deed	9	35	Yemassee
1875	do			Samuel	James A McCrea al	Deed	9	121	St H
do	do			Simon C	R H Gleaves	Deed	9	267	Bft
1877	do			Zena	William C Frye al	Deed	10	588	Yemassee
do	do by Tr	Hannah Abram	Est of Jack Jack Larry Tr Linda B Maria		Henry M Fuller	D in Tr	11	2	----
1879	do			Larry	Henry M Fuller Sr	Deed	11	427	----
1880	do			Simon C	Harry Bee	Deed	12	9	Bft
do	do			Richard	James G Thompson	Deed	12	105	St H
1881	do			Mary	George G Martin	Deed	12	415	----

Quit Claim Deed (QCD) transferring 68 acres of land from Edward S. Philbrick to Hastings Grant [sic], actually believed to be Hastings Gantt, on Saint Helena Island where Penn School is situated.

1868

VILLAGE, ST. HELENA, JANUARY 10, 1868.

MY splendid Christmas box is reminding me daily of your kindness, one and all. The butter is delicious. I never tasted any so good. The crackers, prunes, preserves, all come in at odd times with a marvellously cheering effect. The thick carriage rug “laps us warm” every day, and is so beautiful that I don’t look out of the carriage any more, but keep my eyes on it.

General Gile came up here a day or so ago, and he is now going at once to put up the Frogmore school-house. I am to deed the two acres to trustees, of whom I am to be one, Hastings the other, and Columbus the third. It is to be a substantial building, and large enough, I hope, for a large school.

The planters all intend to give up, and let their places lie idle this year rather than lose as they did last year — or they say so, possibly with a view to having money or rations advanced to them from Government, a most foolish and destructive plan if the Government consents. It is folly itself, and will result in debt, ruin, discontent



According to Laura Towne’s diary, Gantt became a trustee of the Frogmore School. Situated on land near Laura Towne’s home, the Frogmore School was about 3 miles from the Penn School. Photos of the school and students, c. 1911. Courtesy Penn Center Archives.

1868

Beaufort County

S. C.

Prince William's Parish Reg. Prec. St. Helena Parish Reg. Prec.

Chisolm's Elec. Prec.	Beaufort Elec. Prec.
Gardner's Corner " "	Gray's Hill " "
Peoples " "	St. Helena Church " "
Podotaligo " "	
Whipping Swamp " "	

St. Luke's Parish Reg. Prec. St. Peter's Parish Reg. Prec.

Bluffton Elec. Prec.	Brighton Elec. Prec.
Guthrieville " "	Cyprus Creek Church " "
Grahamville " "	Hennis' Cross Roads " "
Hilton Head " "	Lawtonville " "
St. Luke's Church " "	New River Bridge " "
	Ponyburg " "
	Wood Hope " "

Description	Names	Remarks
Colored	Brazier? Moses	
.	Fields. William	
.	Fields. Caesar	
Colored	Glen. March	
.	Giddens. July	
.	Graham. William	
"	Green. Alexander	
"	Gantt. Hastings	
"	Green. John	
"	Gills. Robert	
"	Green. Luck	
"	Green. Robert	
"	Green. Peter	
"	Grant. Toby	
"	Green. Robert	
"	Green. July	
"	Gadsden. Bickelason	
"	Grayson. March	
"	Green. Jeffrey	
"	Grant. Morris	
"	Gourdin. Stephen	
"	Howe. Samuel	
"	Ch...	

Beaufort County voter roll in 1868 with Gantt listed as a registered voter in the St. Helena Parish Precinct. 1868 is the first year that Blacks and formerly enslaved people can vote in the former Confederate states.

1870

BLACK OVER WHITE

Negro Political Leadership
in South Carolina
during Reconstruction

THOMAS HOLT

and eggs that the cotton monoculture had long neglected. This sudden metamorphosis from slave to economic man and the resultant preoccupation with money-making both surprised and offended the spiritual sensibilities of one A.M.A. missionary. "In temporal things, the colored people of these islands, are mainly doing well. I do not think it would be for their good, at the present time, to increas their facilities for getting money. Most of them have ample means for gaining property fast, by their industry & shrewdness: they have become owners of land to a considerable extent, & are raizing cotton, as they say for 'old nigger himself,' & not for 'massa.'" ²⁰

Hastings Gantt, a plantation slave and later a representative from Beaufort for the better part of the decade, was evidently one of this group of newly freed entrepreneurs. By 1870 he had acquired a farm of eighty-four arable acres worth \$900. He owned three milk cows valued at \$100, from which he marketed 100 pounds of butter and 200 gallons of milk. Gantt raised 100 bushels of Indian corn, 650 pounds of rice, 75 bushels of sweet potatoes, and ten bushels of beans, in addition to his staple crop of five bales of cotton.²¹ In 1871 Gantt's success won him election as president of the St. Helena Planter's Society.

Many other ex-slave legislators could boast of similar achievements in the immediate postwar period, but, unlike Gantt, most of them had origins in the same class of slaves that had produced the earlier free Negro class: that is, artisans and domestics. Some of the leading figures in the General Assembly—William Beverly Nash, Prince Rivers, Robert Smalls, William R. Jervay—had been employed as house servants or artisans while in slavery. When the war broke out, two of them were in the process of buying freedom for themselves or their families, and

Historian Dr. Thomas Holt, in 1979, citing the US MSS Agricultural Census demonstrating Gantt's success as farmer and businessman by 1870.

1871

U.S., Freedman's Bank Records, 1865-1874 for Hastings Gantt

Registers of Signatures of Depositors, 1865-1874 > Roll 20: Beaufort, South Carolina; Jun 20, 1868-Jul 3, 1874

No. 4131 Record for Hastings Gantt

Date of Application, Jan 6th 1871.

Where born, Near Charleston S.C.

Where brought up, Little Britain Place near Charleston

Residence, W. Beaufort S.C.

Age, About 40.

Complexion, Dark Brown.

Occupation, Farming.

Works for, Himself.

Wife, Eliza.

Children, Nancy (15), Scipio (13)
Millie Sherman (4), Ellen (2 1/2)

Father, Jas. Gantt.

Mother, Hannah Gantt.

Brothers, None alive. Joseph & Brant
both dead.

Sisters, Polly Brown, Betty Gantt, Lucy
Agneson, Mary Brown, Jyrra
Bullane.

Signature, Hastings Gantt
mark

Signature, Hastings Gantt

No. 4132 Record for Comba Black.

Date of Application, Jan 6th 1871.

Where born, Parts Island S.C.

Where brought up, W. Muller Place Parts Isl. S.C.

Residence, W. Muller Place Parts Isl. S.C.

Age, About 40.

Complexion, Dark Brown.

Occupation, Farming.

Works for, Himself.

Wife, Husband Mary Black dead.

Children, Paris (30), Amelia (17) & Lyman Dawson (20)

Father, [illegible]

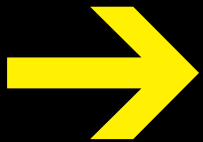
Mother, Jyrra dead long ago.

Brothers, Moses Burnis dead.

Sisters, Sue, Syllie; Phillis Commodore

Signature, Comba Black
mark

It is the wish of Comba Black that after her death her daughter Amelia should have her money.



1871 Freedmen's Bank Record: The record sheds light on Gantt's birthplace, the names of his parents, his siblings, and his children, as of 1871. It likely shows the only known example of his handwriting and signature.

1870 MEMBERS

OF THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

F. J. MOSES, JR., Speaker.

A. O. JONES, Clerk.

ABBEVILLE.

Thomas N. Talbott,
Everidge Cain,

Henry H. Ellison,
Mitchell Goggins,

L. P. Guffin.

ANDERSON.

John Wilson,

Warren D. Wilkes,
William Perry.

BARNWELL.

James N. Hayne,
Benjamin H. Nerland,
Benjamin F. Berry,

Charles D. Hayne,
Edward Ferguson,
E. M. Sumpter.

BEAUFORT.

William J. Whipper,
J. B. Bascomb,
Emil Nehemias,

Nathaniel B. Myers,
Charles S. Kub,
Hastings Gantt,
Samuel Greene.

1874

536

STATUTES AT LARGE

A. D. 1874.
No. 444.

AN ACT TO INCORPORATE THE PLANTERS' REPUBLICAN SOCIETY OF ST. HELENA ISLAND, BEAUFORT COUNTY.

Corporators.

SECTION 1. *Be it enacted* by the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of South Carolina, now met and sitting in General Assembly, and by the authority of the same, That Hastings Gantt, Joseph Bird, Toby Bias, Plato Fields, Moses Brown, Harry Jenkins, Toby Brown, Benjamin Day, and their associates and successors, be, and they are hereby, constituted a body corporate and politic, under the name of "The Planters' Republican Society, of St. Helena Island, Beaufort County," with the right to hold and own property not exceeding in value the sum of ten thousand dollars, with the right to sue and be sued, to plead and be impleaded, in any Court of competent jurisdiction; to have and use a common seal, and the same to alter at will and pleasure, with the right also to make such by-laws for the government of the said corporation not inconsistent with the laws of the land.

Corporate name.

Powers and privileges.

Made a public Act.

SEC. 2. This Act shall be deemed a public Act, and shall remain in force until repealed.

Approved February 12, 1874.

No. 445. AN ACT TO INCORPORATE THE BEAUFORT COUNTY AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL ASSOCIATION.

Corporators.

SECTION 1. *Be it enacted* by the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of South Carolina, now met and sitting in General Assembly, and by the authority of the same, That Robert Smalls, P. L. Wiggins, Samuel Green, W. Kressel, F. W. Sheper, S. W. Wallace, J. B. Bascomb, J. H. Ruddell, C. J. Colcock, R. L. Bostick, E. J. Ravenah, J. W. Collins, William Fields, R. F. Greaves, Dr. Paul Pritchard, John M. Harvey, Hastings Gantt and J. A. J. Gill, and their associates and successors, be, and they are hereby declared to be, a body corporate and politic in law, by the

As Representative, Gantt was involved in setting up societies and associations for St. Helena, including The Planter's Republican Society and The Beaufort County Agricultural and Mechanical Association.

1902

1915	Do		Martha H		W R Eve Jr	Deed	12	5	----
1916	Do		Martha H		W R Eve Jr	Deed	35	108	Bft
1919	Do		Martha		W R Eve Jr	Deed	37	311	Bft
1871	Gallusha		Norman H	Sarah F	Stephen Wilson	Deed	5	398	St H
1929	Galusha		Norman H by Exr		Eugene Von Voorhis	Deed	48	25	St H
1911	Gand al		Isabel C		Mill Haven Co	Tim D	30	190	----
1913	Do al		Isabelle C		Henry C Cheves al	Q C D	32	41	Sheldon
1907	Gandy			W H	W H Lockwood by Extrx al	Deed	26	712	Bft
1874	Gannett al		J G		I W Maner	Satisfaction) of Mtg	8	532	---
1921	Ganett al	George			Rebecca Jenkins	Deed	41	78	----
Do	Do	Frank C			March Simmons	Deed	41	339	Bft
1928	Gannon			Ruth B	Allan T Cannon	Deed	45	968	----
1901	Gantt			Weymoth	Cornelia Gantt	Deed	24	226	Bft
Do	Do	Hastings			Thomas Lea	Deed	24	236	St H
1902	Do	Hastings			Penn Normal Ind & Agric School	Deed	24	345	St H
1905	Do	Hastings			Penn Normal Ind & Agric School	Deed	27	61	St H
1907	Gannt al by Atty	F H & C M E P & Drayton		R P W D & R L	Halls Island Farms	Deed	27	333	Sheldon
1912	Do al	Cornelia			J J Drayton	Deed	30	308	----
1923	Do al	Allen	James	Sadie Smart	U S	Release	40	186	----
1926	Gant al			S I	John H L Major	Deed	44	508	----
Do	Do		Mamie L by Shf		J Oscar Williams	Shf D	46	7	Bft
1927	Do		Isabella		James Green	Deed	45	747	St H

In 1902, Gantt sold 68.1 acres to Penn for \$755.60. His wife Celia was present as a witness. Gantt retained 10 acres on which to live and farm. In 1905, Gantt arranged for his remaining 10 acres to transfer to the Penn School upon his death.



1966

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at Penn Center in 1966 for the annual Southern Christian Leadership Conference staff workshop. From left: Jesse Jackson, Jr., Joan Baez, Ira Sandperl, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dora McDonald.
Photo by Bob Fitch, Stanford University Libraries.



Present

Gantt Cottage built c. 1940 was named in honor of Hastings Gantt.
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stayed in Gantt Cottage in 1966. Drafts of King's speech delivered at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom were later found in the cottage.
Photo: Pure+Applied