



## **The Water Brought Us**

By Dr. Linda Hancock

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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There are about thirty-five Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. White owners of the rice plantations needed labour to take care of the crops. The owners also could not tolerate the heat and were vulnerable to insects. Because of this, they began importing slaves who were experienced rice growers from West Africa, could handle hot weather and were immune to insects and disease.

For a period of about two hundred years this practice of importing slaves from Africa to America continued until it was banned by Congress in 1808.

The immigrants were packed onto ships with little room to move. Many did not survive the long trip. They had left friends and family to be treated like chattel in a new country. Life was extremely difficult for them.

When they arrived at the Sea Islands they were isolated and, because of this and their need to communicate with each other and their masters, they developed the Gullah Geechee language. This consisted of words from their varied African backgrounds mixed with English and therefore is known as Creole (more than one language combined).

Besides the language, the Gullahs formed a culture that consisted of unique spiritual beliefs, storytelling, crafts and music. Because the Sea Islands were not originally accessible, the culture and language flourished. This and the recipes, superstitions, and style of dress were passed down from one generation to another.

At the time of the Civil War, there was great confusion. Many of the white owners left the Sea Islands to protect themselves and their children. The black slaves, however, were left and not only gained their freedom but also were able to secure land for themselves. Those who were willing to fight with the Union army against the Confederates gained freedom for all of their family members.

Since the end of the Civil War much has changed for the Gullah culture. Roads and bridges have been built to connect the Sea Islands to the mainland. The economy has changed as have the crops. Many rice and cotton fields were replaced with root crops. Big business has been buying the land close to the water that was previously owned by the people in order to build. This has prevented the people from fishing and other activities that they enjoyed in the past.

Through it all, however, the Gullah culture has survived. I was fortunate to have a Gullah tour when I was visiting Charleston, South Carolina. I heard about many of the customs and stories that author Muriel Miller Branch refers to in this book. I visited the slave market and saw the sweet grass baskets being sold in the streets. I viewed the famous iron gates that were designed and built by Philip Simmons. And I purchased "The Water Brought Us" in Liberty Square.

Cultural memory and the efforts of each generation to share the uniqueness of the Gullah ways have allowed them to be preserved.

Reading this book was a reminder of the sacrifice that so many made to develop North America and the importance of the traditions developed by our ancestors.

A good read.