



Ossabaw Oracle

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A publication of the Ossabaw Island Foundation

Friends of Ossabaw Day—Saturday, June 10

The Ossabaw Island Foundation is hosting a Friends of Ossabaw day on Saturday, June 10, 2006.

To fulfill our mission, we rely on the generosity of our members. As a way of saying thank you, we are conducting a full day adventure on the island, for members only! If it has been a while since your last visit we think you will be amazed at what you'll see:

- The Boarding House Restoration Project underway
- We have just wrapped up another month-long archeological investigation of the slave tabbies, resulting in some very interesting discoveries.
- The Ossabaw Island Education Alliance, an innovative partnership between the Foundation, The Board of Regents and the Department of

Natural Resources has just completed a series of eight roundtable discussions bringing researchers, scientists and educators to the island with the goal of establishing Ossabaw as a nationally recognized center for education.

If your membership has expired we hope you will renew your membership.

If you are not a member, we hope you will join and become a Friend of Ossabaw.

If you are currently a member we hope you will take advantage of this special day.

As a special "thank you", participants will receive a full-sized print of William Armstrong's *Low Tide at Bradley Beach, Ossabaw Island* at the end of the day!

Friends of Ossabaw Day—Details

DATE: Saturday June 10

COST: \$50 per person

This cost covers roundtrip boat transportation and full day tour.

You will need to bring your own sack lunch and beverage.

TIME: Depart Delegal Marina at The Landings at 9:30 a.m. and return around 4 p.m.

Space is limited to 30 people.

For more information or to reserve space, contact Jim Bitler, On Island Coordinator @ 912.210.1613.

For information about joining or renewing your membership, contact Elizabeth DuBose, Executive Director of the Ossabaw Island Foundation, 145 Bull Street, Savannah, GA 31401, or call 912.233.5104.



LAMAR Institute digs Ossabaw, again

The LAMAR Institute team returned to Ossabaw this past January to excavate and recover archaeological information from the cultural strata inside the middle tabby know as tabby #2.

Tabby #2 contains a wealth of material culture evidence dating from 1760-1920. This year's excavations yielded larger study collections for important artifact classes such as ceramics, glass, arms, clothing, tobacco, and furniture related artifacts.

"These larger study collections will allow for more



in-depth analysis of material culture," states Dan Elliott, President of LAMAR Institute.

In addition to the above-mentioned artifacts, "Samples of animal bone and ethno-botanical remains form another important study collection", says Elliott. Soil samples were also taken for flotation, palynology and chemical analyses.

"This third study collection will provide important clues about human existence and man to land relationships and the past environment of the site." ...Most of these revelations will take place during the laboratory analysis phase, so stay tuned.

Jim's Bits - Indigo

A year of archeological investigation of the c.1840's tabby slave quarters on the island's north end has unearthed many artifacts. I have been particularly interested in the ones that date to the 18th century when John Morel established North End Plantation. It was during this period that the harvesting of live oak for ship timbers and the cultivation of indigo was introduced to Ossabaw. The indigo growing wild around The Clubhouse prompted me to do a little research into the history and processing of this shrubby non-descript perennial.

Prior to 1897, when the color blue was synthesized for the first time, the only source of blue dye came from plants. Woad (*Isatis tinctoria*) was used extensively in Western Europe where it was native. By the late 17th century, however, a plant known as Indigo that provided a stronger, richer blue replaced it. One variety of indigo was *Indigofera tinctoria*, native to Asia and another popular variety was *Indigofera suffruticosa*, native to Mexico. While

the Asian variety was considered the finest, the Mexican variety was cultivated extensively on plantations in South Carolina, Georgia and Florida and is the variety still growing on Ossabaw today.

Typically seeds were sown in March. By June the plants were 3-4 feet high, setting flower buds and ready to harvest. Branches were cut at the base and hauled away for processing. The first step was to submerge the branches in a vat full of water known as a Steeper. In 18-24 hours the plants would ferment, at which point the liquid was drawn off into a second vat known as the Beater. It was here that the liquid was stirred, paddled and agitated, introducing oxygen into the mix.

Eventually a chemical in the liquid, known as indica, would particulate and settle to the bottom of the vat. When enough sediment had collected, the liquid was drawn off

into a third vat to settle further. The pudding-consistency sediment in the Beater vat called "indigo mud" was scooped out and hung in cloth bags to drain. The next day the mud was removed and pressed into brick-sized molds. Once dry, the indigo was removed from the molds and cut into 1.5" squares and packed for export.



Indigofera suffruticosa

The noxious stench associated with processing indigo is well documented.

Apparently the fermented liquid smelled so foul, processing facilities were always located well away from dwellings. The bricks must have reeked as well since they attracted hordes of flies. Early on, even the process of converting the bricks into dye was a smelly operation since stale human urine was the catalyst. Fortunately, tannic acid and wood ash were discovered to be equally effective catalysts so there is hope for an indigo processing program on Ossabaw!



Educational Alliance Update

The Ossabaw Island Education Alliance continues to push forward initiatives that hold promise for tapping the enormous potential of the island for education.

- Eight archaeologists met on January 23rd to help lay the groundwork for a research design for Ossabaw. Included in this group was Dr. David Hurst Thomas, curator of the American Museum of Natural History, and archaeologist for the Spanish Gualé Mission on St. Catherine's Island.
- The Georgia Department of Education has submitted a proposal for a Coastal Incentive Grant seeking funds to develop Ossabaw as a learning experience for public school students in the state.
- On April 5th, a team of humanities scholars met to lay the groundwork for a NEH grant for interpreting the North End Plantation in the full context of coastal history, including African American life on barrier islands, the manufacturing of indigo dye, and the growth of sea island cotton.
- Armstrong Atlantic State University hosted a team of school educators with college faculty on the island for a day as the first step in developing projects for the federally funded PRISM program to improve science and math education in fifty-nine coastal elementary, middle and high schools.
- We are beginning to see educational groups respond to the new opportunities. The Massie Heritage Center of the Savannah/Chatham County School System is bringing out teachers for a professional development experience on Ossabaw in June.

And I myself am enjoying a wholly new kind of life – venturing onto the island about once a week, talking with educators about why they should be involved in outdoors education (The teachers at Savannah Country Day would do a double flip on that!), and working with the wonderfully supportive personnel of DNR.

Paul Pressly

Shirts! Posters! Books! Notecards!

Order Now at the Ossabaw Gift Shop

T-shirts feature Craig Rubadoux's Ossabaw animals on the front (the ones you see running across the Ossabaw Oracle) and a map of the Georgia Coast on back. Short or long sleeved, dark green shirt/beige printing.

Books include *Evocations of an Island* hardcover book, as well as boxed note cards featuring four different images from the book, (8 cards total, with 2 cards each image) and now, back by popular demand, Ann Foskey's *Images of America: Ossabaw Island*.

We're also pleased to offer prints of William Armstrong's painting of Bradley Beach.

Please send ___ copy(ies) of *Evocations* @ \$29.95 _____

Please send ___ copy(ies) of *Images of America* @ \$20 _____

Please send ___ box(es) of *Evocations* Notecards @ \$10 _____

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The Ossabaw Island Foundation

145 Bull Street
Savannah, GA 31401

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A gift in memory of Peter J. Smyth, who would have loved everything about Ossabaw Island from Rence, Daniel and Piers Smyth	
Wiley A. Wasden in memory of Lee A. Gay who loved our island and best wishes to Sandy West.	



The Rock Group

Raymond M Cash Foundation
Jane Feiler
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Note from the Chair

Friends and lovers of Ossabaw: Exciting things are underway on Ossabaw, and we value so very much your continuing interest and support. The Ossabaw Island Foundation is working with DNR to tap the enormous potential that the island presents for teaching, for inspiration, and for creativity. The Ossabaw Island Education Alliance, a joint project of TOIF, DNR and the Board of Regents, is stimulating important endeavors in archeology, history of the coast, science education and research.

To accomplish our goals we have several pressing needs. First, we need more accommodations on the island and a decent place for our indomitable on-island coordinator Jim Bitler to call his island home. To that end, we have started work on the Boarding House renovation in the belief that we are very close to matching the \$125,000 Challenge Grant from the Cash Foundation. As of press time, we need just \$30,000. If you want to contribute, please contact me or Elizabeth. Second, we also realized that we need a plan to chart our

course for the future. The Board has embarked with great enthusiasm on a strategic planning process to define our goals and to help ensure we can meet them. Board member Martin Melaver is heading up this process. We will be reaching out to stakeholders and users of the island for input into this plan. If you want to contribute your thoughts, please email me at pbarmeyer@kslaw.com.

In the meantime, our terrific staff continues to keep this going. Elizabeth DuBose, Executive Director and expert in restoration of historic buildings is running the foundation as well as managing the Boarding House renovation project. Dr. Paul Pressly, recently retired headmaster from Savannah Country Day School, has given highlights in this newsletter of his wide-ranging endeavors for the Education Alliance. Jim Bitler continues to make Ossabaw come alive for anyone who has the opportunity to visit the island. We so appreciate their great work!

Patricia Barmeyer

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