



Ossabaw Oracle

Revealing the voices and mystery of Ossabaw Island

Vol. XV No. 1
Spring 2009
A publication of the
Ossabaw Island Foundation

The Birds of Ossabaw Island: Spring Day Trip is May 16

On Saturday, May 16, join noted coastal Georgia birder Diana Churchill on a bird-lovers tour of Ossabaw Island. Visit Pine Barren Pond rookery on Ossabaw Island, with stops at other important island bird habitats. The rookery is a secluded nesting and mating habitat for several species of wading birds.

This birding-oriented education trip is scheduled during the peak season for great egrets, snowy egrets, endangered nesting wood storks, and perhaps an anhinga or a night heron.



Photo Credit: Alan Gardener

On-Island Coordinator Jim Bitler will co-lead the trip with Churchill, who writes a weekly birding column for the Savannah Morning News Close-Ups.

Other stops on the island trip will include visits to maritime forest and a variety of wetland habitats. Bring-your-own picnic for our lunch stop under the pines behind Middle Beach, near the site of the Torrey family's former beach house.

For novices or veterans, this day trip will be one for the birds!

Register for Spring Day Trip

Birding Trip to Ossabaw Island with Diana Churchill

Date: Saturday, May 16

Time: 9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Fee: \$50 for Friends of Ossabaw Island, \$65 for Future Friends of Ossabaw Island.

Other information:

- Depart and return to Delegal Marina on Skidaway Island.
- Bring your own lunch and water.
- Trip requires some physical exertion. Not recommended for people with knee, hip or back problems.
- Trip will occur rain or shine, except for during severe weather watches or warnings.
- No refunds. In the case of trip cancellation due to weather, the trip will be rescheduled.
- Casual outdoor clothes and closed toed shoes recommended.
- Restroom facilities are available on the island.

To register or for more information, contact Jim Bitler, On-Island Coordinator at 912.210.1613 or jim@ossabawisland.org

Annual Meeting Recap: Coastal Georgia Historian Buddy Sullivan Steals the Show!

The Coastal Georgia Center in Savannah was packed for The Ossabaw Island Foundation 2009 Annual Meeting in mid-January. Keynote speaker Buddy Sullivan captivated the 125-plus attendees, comparing the natural and cultural history of Ossabaw Island with Sapelo Island, fifteen miles south in McIntosh County.

In his signature conversational style, Sullivan placed Ossabaw Island into the larger context of the southeastern Atlantic coast—an excellent review for longtime coastal naturalists and historians, and an ideal introduction for many new friends of Ossabaw that attended the meeting.



Scheduled to coincide with island resident and matriarch Eleanor “Sandy” West’s 96th birthday, the annual meeting was a chance for Friends of Ossabaw Island to review accomplishments from 2008 and look ahead at what is planned this year. Highlights included: a report on the first year of the OssaBest Science Education program for public school students and teachers; a recap of the 2008 African American history symposium; progress being made on the restoration and archeology of three tabby cabins at the North End of the island; an update on the Boarding House restoration, including a peek at the solar

See Annual Meeting, p. 6

Dr. Allison Dorsey Announced as First Ossabaw Fellow Award Recipient

Dr. Allison Dorsey has been selected by The Ossabaw Island Foundation as the first recipient of the Sandy West Ossabaw Fellowship.

Dorsey is an Associate Professor of History, and Coordinator of Black Studies, at Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

Dorsey's most recent paper is "'The great cry of our people is Land!': Black Settlement and Community Development on Ossabaw Island, 1865-1900," published in early 2008. In the paper, Dorsey discusses her research on the lives of African American freedmen on Ossabaw Island and in coastal Georgia in the decades after emancipation.

As the Ossabaw Fellow, Dorsey will receive an honorarium and a one-week residency on Ossabaw Island.

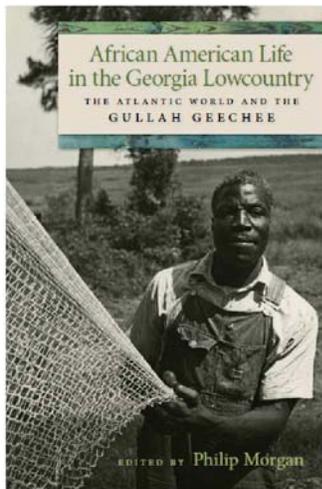
Dorsey was a presenter at the 2008 African-American history symposium sponsored by The Ossabaw Island Education Alliance. She is continuing her research on the freedmen of Ossabaw Island.

"My current research project focuses on the life of a black freedman, Mustapha Shaw, who I discovered in my work on Ossabaw Island," writes Dorsey. "Shaw was one of the former U.S. Colored Troops who came to Ossabaw Island and expected to receive part of the land distribution (the much heralded *forty acres and a mule*) of 'Sherman's Reservation.' "Shaw and a few others left Ossabaw once the federal government revoked



Sherman's Field Order 15," continues Dorsey. "They relocated to the mainland (Shaw to McIntosh County, others to White Bluff) where they became part of the first generation of black land owners after the American Civil War. "My work as I envision it, part biography - part community study, will detail the life and struggles of 19th century black landowners in McIntosh County as they rose, in less than two generations, from impoverished freedmen to independent members of a prosperous black middle class."

The Ossabaw Fellowship was established in 2008 to honor Ossabaw Island's longest known resident and supporter, Eleanor "Sandy" West, who established and operated the Ossabaw Island Project and the Genesis



Project on Ossabaw Island from 1961 to 1983. She was instrumental in her family's decision to make a bargain sale of Ossabaw Island to the State of Georgia in 1978 for use as the state's first Heritage Preserve. West, 96, has lived on the island full time since 1986.

The Ossabaw Fellowship is intended to honor Sandy West by recognizing creative endeavors of a person working in any

field, whose endeavor relates to or is inspired by Ossabaw Island.

Dorsey's 2008 paper will be part of the forthcoming book *African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry*, coming out in Fall 2009 from University of Georgia Press.

Winter and Summer; Expanded Visiting Artists Program a Hit

Over half a dozen artists spent time on Ossabaw Island in early 2009 and a dozen more have already signed up to come as the Visiting Artists Program expanded to include the winter months for the first time since its inception.

As announced in our Fall 2008 newsletter, the program was expanded to give artists the chance to be inspired by the unique light, bare trees, and wintertime happenings of the island. Over the past eight years, the Visiting Artists Program has provided the opportunity for over 500 visual artists to experience the island.

"Having the opportunity to see Ossabaw through the lenses of so many different people is wonderful," says Jim Bitler, On-Island Coordinator for the Ossabaw Island Foundation. "I have learned to look at Ossabaw in different ways."

The summer Visiting Artist Program will continue this year. A limited number of spaces will be made available to visual artists, who will be housed in the 1890's era Club House or the Boarding House. On-island coordinator Jim Bitler will provide an overview of Ossabaw's natural and built environment, as well as transportation around the island.

In return for your adventure on Ossabaw Island, we ask that you donate at least one finished piece of Ossabaw-inspired art (framed if applicable) to the Art Auction held during the annual Pig Roast in October. The proceeds of the auction benefit the Torrey-West House Fund. Art must be delivered to The Ossabaw Island Foundation by September 15.

Contact On-Island Coordinator Jim Bitler 912-210-1613 or jim @ ossabawisland.org to schedule your artistic inspiration.

Check out some websites of visiting artists: www.ladiesofossabaw.org and www.ossabawislandart.com

The Ossabaw Gift Shop

T-shirts feature Craig Rubadoux's Ossabaw animals on the front and a map of the Georgia Coast on back. Short or long sleeved, buff shirt/brown printing.

Books include *Evocations of an Island* hardcover book, by Jack Leigh, Alan Campbell and James Kilgo, as well as boxed note cards featuring four different images from the book, (8 cards total, with 2 cards each image). Also, Ann Foskey's *Images of America: Ossabaw Island*, and now, *The God of the Hinge, Sojourns in Cloud Cuckoo Land* by Elizabeth Pool and Eleanor West. We also offer prints of William Armstrong's painting of Bradley Beach.

- Please send ___ copy(ies) of *God of the Hinge* @ \$16.95 _____
- 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 _____
- Please send ___ copy(ies) of Bradley Beach poster @ \$20 _____
- Please send ___ Short-sleeved T-shirt, S M L XL @ \$15 _____
- Please send ___ Long-sleeved T-shirt, S M L XL @ \$20 _____

Symposium DVDs

- Please send ___ DVD(s): Erskine Clark @ \$20 _____
- Please send ___ DVD(s): Allison Dorsey @ \$20 _____
- Please send ___ DVD(s): Emory Campbell @ \$20 _____

For US postage and handling, enclose \$6 for up to three items, \$12 for four or more items. _____

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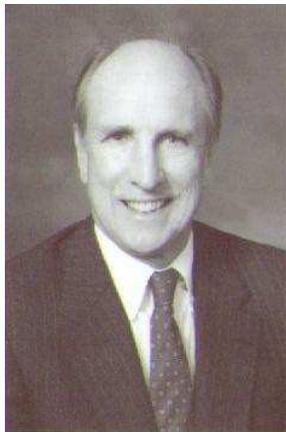
The Ossabaw Island Foundation
305 Fahm Street
Savannah, GA 31401

Dr. Paul Pressly Chosen for State Humanities Award

Paul Pressly, director of The Ossabaw Island Education Alliance, has been named a recipient of the 24th annual Governor's Awards in the Humanities.

The award recognizes special achievements in history, culture, ideas and stories about Georgia. Governor Sonny Perdue will present the awards to ten recipients at an event in Atlanta on May 7.

Pressly joined the Ossabaw Island Education Alliance in June 2005, after 21 years as head of The Savannah Country Day School. He holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from Princeton University, Harvard University, and Oxford University, and has served on numerous national boards related to academics and history. He currently serves on the boards of the Telfair Museum of Art,



Dr. Paul Pressly

the Advisory Council of the University of Georgia Press and The Georgia Historical Society.

He is being acknowledged for his role in enhancing public appreciation of the historical and cultural significance of the Georgia lowcountry.

In 2008, under Pressly's leadership, the Alliance partnered with The Ossabaw Island Foundation and nearly a dozen other cultural and educational organizations to sponsor *African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry: 18th to the 20th Century*, a two-day history symposium in Savannah. Nearly 500 expert and novice historians from across the United States and several foreign countries attended this first-of-its-kind event. Pressly is spearheading a book on the

same subject which will be released later this year by University of Georgia Press.

As a companion project, The Ossabaw Island Foundation and Armstrong Atlantic State University are working on an oral history project with Pinpoint Community, settled at the turn of the twentieth century by descendants of freedmen from Ossabaw Island. The oral history and related research is preserving Pinpoint stories that link its history to Ossabaw Island and other coastal barrier islands. Pressly was instrumental in bringing together Pinpoint and AASU for this project.

"Paul Pressly brought his reputation for scholarship to Ossabaw," said Helen Downing, Chair of the Ossabaw Island Foundation. "But it's much more than that. He has a deep, almost spiritual commitment to people, and a passion for the history of the coast that is evident in everything he does, for Ossabaw and for the entire community."

Celebrating the Lives of Three Friends of Ossabaw: Bo Bowens, Raymond Cash and John Earl

In 2008, Ossabaw Island lost three important and unique allies. Marion “Bo” Bowens of Pinpoint community, Raymond Cash of Oakdale community, and John Earl of Savannah each had a vital connection with Ossabaw Island. Each contributed in different ways to assure that the Ossabaw Island legacy will remain in place for future generations. The Ossabaw Island Foundation is grateful for the passion and commitment of these friends. We miss them deeply.

Marion “Bo” Bowens

Bo Bowens was a child of Ossabaw whose lifelong spirit of connection to the island led to exploration of a long-neglected chapter in its history. Bowens’ love of his two home places, Ossabaw Island and Pinpoint in Chatham County, revitalized the bonds between them, linking the current Pinpoint residents to their ancestral community of enslaved people and freedmen that existed on Ossabaw Island from the 18th to the 20th century.



Born in Savannah, Bowens lived in one of the three remaining tabby cabins on the north end of Ossabaw Island in the 1940’s, when his parents worked for the Torrey family. In late childhood he moved with his parents to Pinpoint, an historic African American community founded in the early 20th century by freedmen who had formerly lived on Ossabaw.

A decorated Vietnam War veteran, Bowens was retired from Gulfstream Aviation in Savannah, and owned a bait and supplies business.

In 2006, Bowens and other Pinpoint residents visited Ossabaw Island for the first time since their youth, touring their former home and sharing memories of life on the island.

Out of the momentum from that visit, Bowens created the Ossabaw Heritage Association, an organization of Pinpoint Community residents with historic links to Ossabaw Island, and pushed for the recovery of the stories of his community. From 2006 until his death in June 2008, he worked with the Ossabaw Island Foundation and Armstrong Atlantic State University on capturing the stories of his two linked communities as part of an oral history project.

“African Americans in the Georgia Lowcountry and the Atlantic World: 18th to the 20th Century,” a history symposium held in 2008, was an offshoot of the work

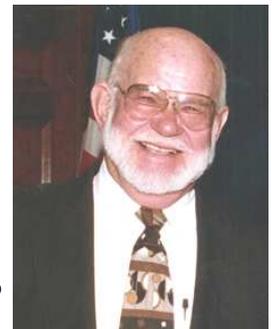
sparked by Bowens’ efforts.

“Bo understood the importance of the past, and of the rich cultural heritage of the Gullah Geechee,” said Paul Pressly, director of the Ossabaw Island Education Alliance. “He had a vision of recreating the history of his community for the benefit of future generations.”

At the time of his death, Bowens was in discussion with The Georgia Conservancy to create a plan for Pinpoint, to preserve its heritage and to articulate goals for the future of that community. In 2009, residents of Pinpoint will begin the “Blueprint Community Plan” project in partnership with the Georgia Conservancy.

Raymond M. Cash

Former Georgia Governor Roy Barnes described the late Raymond Cash as “one of those self-made men that you have to admire.” After a lifetime of successful business ventures, Cash established The Raymond M. Cash Foundation in 1996, “[spending] his later years giving away the money he earned to charities” according to the Marietta Daily Journal.



Soon after establishing his foundation, Cash was introduced to Ossabaw Island by then-board-member Brian Rosborough, at a time when structures on the island were rapidly deteriorating due to deferred maintenance needs. He “appeared out of nowhere and gave a substantial amount of money to preserve the island,” said Barnes in a Marietta Daily Journal news story.

Cash’s gifts made possible the restoration of the terracotta tile roof on the Torrey-West House, often called “The Main House”; and the restoration of the Clubhouse and the Boarding House (scheduled for completion in June 2009).

From that first contribution until his death in late December 2008, Cash’s love of the outdoors kept him keenly attuned to “the mission of the Ossabaw Island Heritage Preserve as an unspoiled place,” said Elizabeth DuBose, TOIF Executive Director.

“Raymond Cash’s donations came at critical times, ensuring that these structures will house current or future generations of scientists and educators who share his appreciation for Ossabaw and his passion for the natural environment,” said DuBose.

Source: Marietta Daily Journal, December 30, 2008

John Earl

Visitors to the Clubhouse on Ossabaw Island are familiar with several color photographs of the island by John Earl, displayed on the walls of the living room and the large kitchen. Earl's images, shot in the 1970's, include a blooming dogwood draped with Spanish moss, a raccoon closeup, a seascape, and two photos of chimpanzees from the Yerkes Primate Research Center that lived in the wild for nearly 10 years on the island.

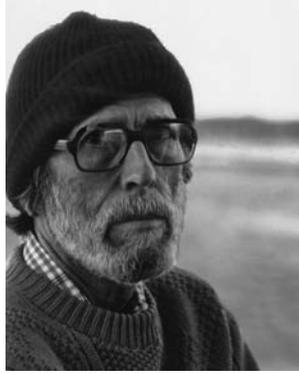


Photo Credit: Noel Wright

Earl, who died in December 2008, was a nationally acclaimed photographer who began his career in midlife, after decades as a successful jazz drummer and vocalist. Earl made his first visit to Ossabaw in the early 1970's as a photography intern for James Valentine, who was shooting images for the book *Guale: The Golden Coast of Georgia*.

Some of Earl's earliest published images were featured in *Guale*, including a distinctive shot of Ossabaw Island. "The big center photograph, it's a double page.... That is Ossabaw... Mule Run Swamp," said Susan Earl, John's wife.

"Jimmy [Valentine] liked some of John's work so well that he put John's work in there, about 10 to 12 photos. The Ossabaw photo is one of them."

"They were on Ossabaw for several weeks photographing. He got to know [Sandy West] and started going to the [Ossabaw Island] Project (OIP). At some point he was on the board of The Project." For several years, John regularly participated in OIP and in the Genesis Project. He and Susan met on the island in 1977 and married the next year.

In 1975 Sierra Club Books published "John Muir's Longest Walk" by Earl, which traces the 19th century naturalist's East Coast travels using Earl's photographs (including some from Ossabaw) and quotes from Muir's journals. Earl collaborated on a third book, "To Look at Anything" (1978), a collection of poems by noted writers, illustrated with Earl's images.

From 1980 until 2004, Earl taught photography and music at the Savannah College of Art and Design, and for decades taught nature photography to hundreds of private students.

"John learned so much from the other artists and writers he met on Ossabaw," said Susan. "He was nurtured by Sandy West, who encouraged and respected him as an artist which was so important in the early stages of his career as a photographer."

The following businesses, organizations and people gave to the Ossabaw Fund in memory of John Earl:

Coastal Home Care and Altrus Assisted Living

Jane E. O'Farrell

Mr. & Mrs. Edwin J. Feiler Jr.

Coastal Jazz Association

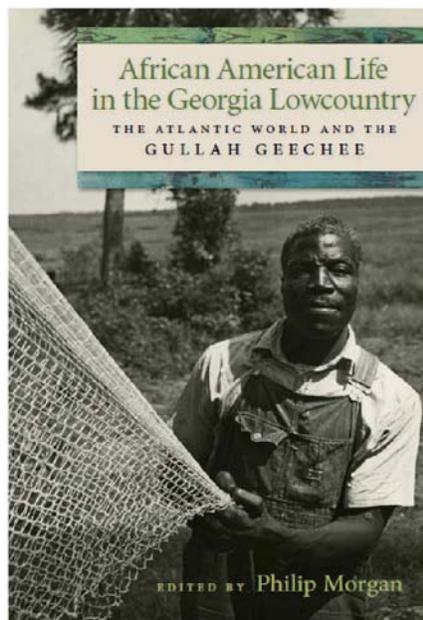
The staff of Georgia Infirmity and Source Program

African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry: The Symposium Book coming soon!

This fall the University of Georgia Press will publish *African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry: The Atlantic World and the Gullah Geechee*, edited by Philip Morgan.

Dedicated to the African Americans who lived and worked on Ossabaw Island and to their descendents in Pinpoint and elsewhere who continue to foster their rich heritage, the book features essays on the history of African Americans in the Georgia islands and coast.

The essays were written by the presenters from the 2008 symposium, "The Atlantic World and African American Life and Culture: 18th to the 20th Century" sponsored by the



Ossabaw Island Foundation.

"This is a fascinating and important collection. These thoughtful and incisive essays by an international team of interdisciplinary scholars illuminate a place and a past still palpable today, reminding us not only of the collective tragedies of slavery and segregation but also of the creation and evolution of the indomitable and beautiful Gullah-Geechee culture," comments Charles Joyner, author of *Down by the Riverside*.

As the book becomes available, look for further information on ordering here in the *Ossabaw Oracle*.

Island Burial Site Sheds Light on Prehistoric Indian Culture

An excavation in late 2008 of a prehistoric American Indian burial site on Ossabaw Island revealed cremated remains, an unexpected find that offers a glimpse into ancient Indian culture along Georgia's coast.

State archaeologist David Crass of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources said prehistoric cremations were rare, particularly during the early time in which preliminary evidence suggests this one occurred, possibly 1000 B.C. to A.D. 350. The remains also mark the first cremation uncovered on Ossabaw.

"This interment broadens our knowledge about ... the kinds of belief (involving) death within the Woodland Period," Crass said. "This is not something we have seen before on Ossabaw Island. Similar cremations on St. Catherine's Island may point to this practice being more widespread than we have believed up to now."

Crass said during this time American Indians in Georgia moved to the coast in the winter for shellfish, then inland in the spring for deer hunting and into uplands in the fall for gathering nuts. "This site may have been a winter season camp," he said.

Erosion from natural causes exposed the burial on an Ossabaw bluff in mid-2008. Scientists from the DNR Office

of the State Archaeologist, the non-profit Lamar Institute and the Georgia Council on American Indian Concerns worked under the council's direction to excavate the roughly 6- by 6-foot pit. As required by state law, Crass informed the council about the situation and organized the excavation at the group's request.



The work revealed a cremation pit that had been lined with wood and oyster shells. The body had been placed on top of the wood and the contents of the pit burned. The human remains recovered were primarily from extremities, indicating that the deceased had been disinterred after cremation, possibly to be reburied elsewhere.

The charcoal will be submitted for carbon 14 dating, but preliminary analysis of the pottery recovered from the pit suggests the cremation may date to the period from 1000

B.C. to A.D. 350. A ground-penetrating radar survey showed many prehistoric American Indian features in the general area, Crass said. The bluff apparently had long been a focal point of prehistoric human activity.

After analysis, the remains will be reinterred in a secure location under the auspices of the Council on American Indian Concerns. Crass expects the carbon 14 dating results and details on the radar survey in 2009.

Source: Georgia Department of Natural Resources



Annual Meeting, continued from P. 1

water and heating system; a short video of Dr. Allison Dorsey, first recipient of The Sandy West Ossabaw Fellowship (*see article on page 2*); and a video remembrance of Marion "Bo" Bowens, founder of the Ossabaw Heritage Association (*see article on page 4*).

Ossabaw Island Foundation Board Chair Helen Downing recognized and thanked retiring board members Bill Haile, Chris Miller, and Justin West. Gillian Shallcross, Patricia Barmeyer, Peggy Galis and Jim Noyes were welcomed to the board.

The board presented a special award of



thanks to Elizabeth DuBose, who marked her tenth anniversary as Executive Director of The Ossabaw Island Foundation in 2008.

After the meeting, guests signed a birthday card for Sandy West and enjoyed birthday cake to honor her special day and to celebrate another successful year for the foundation.

Jim Bitler, On-Island Coordinator cuts Mrs. West's 96th birthday cake at the Annual Meeting.

Friends of Ossabaw 2009

Thank you to the Friends of Ossabaw who support the exceptional educational, cultural and scientific programs on Ossabaw.

The Ossabaw Donkey \$20-\$99

Wilson & Sarah Barmeyer
Cynthia Bendler
A gift from Daniel Burns in memory of
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Mr. & Mrs. Richard H. Werner
Margaret L. Willits
Elsie H. Wilson, descendant of John &
Lena Buys, plantation managers on
Ossabaw in the late 1700s.

Lucky the Ossabaw Pig (\$100-\$499)

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John Angell
LeeAnn & Saunders Aldridge
Jennifer Lance Atkinson
Ian Benham
A gift from Don & Pat Bixby for the
Torrey West Furniture Fund
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A gift in honor of Eleanor Torrey West
from Annette J. Hines
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A gift in honor of Paul Pressly from John
& Barbara Lientz
A gift in honor of Sandy West from
Crosby Milne
Maryanne Mott
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Karen M. Schaefer
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Ned & Mary Sommer
Mark V. Smith
Mr. & Mrs. William Steinhauer
Mr. & Mrs. Hue Thomas III
A gift in honor of Eleanor T. West on her
95th & 96th birthdays from Ken Thomas
Jim & Shirley Triplett
Vantosh & Associates
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Mary Thrower Wickham
A gift in honor of Sandy West from
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Linda & Michael Zoller

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Burton Family Foundation
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Great Egret (\$5,000-\$9,999)

A gift in honor of Sandy West's 96th
birthday from Patricia T. Barmeyer

Great Blue Heron (\$10,000 and above)

Helen Downing



Photo Credit: Alan Gardener

*Contributions to the Ossabaw Island Foundation,
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elizabeth@ossabawisland.org

Mark Your Calendars!

Fall Day Trip

Saturday, September 19

Pig Roast & Art Auction

Saturday, October 17

Annual Meeting

Thursday, January 14, 2010

What is Ossabaw Island?

Ossabaw Island is a barrier island on the Atlantic Ocean owned by the State of Georgia and located in Chatham County.

Who is the Ossabaw Island Foundation?

The non-profit Ossabaw Island Foundation, through a public-private partnership with the State of Georgia, inspires, promotes, and manages exceptional educational, cultural, and scientific programs that are designed to maximize the experience of Ossabaw Island, while minimizing the impact on its resources.

