

OSSABAW ISLAND FOUNDATION AND EDUCATION ALLIANCE 25 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

1998-2023

Sharing and Preserving Ossabaw Island: Georgia's First Heritage Preserve

The Ossabaw Island Foundation (TOIF) was established in 1994 to manage programming and facilities on Ossabaw Island. Our partnership with the State of Georgia was formalized in 1998 with the signing of the Ossabaw Island Use Agreement. This renewable "contract" gives TOIF exclusive right of use of the North End of Ossabaw Island, and shared use, with the State, of the island's southern portion. TOIF pays an annual use fee to the State of Georgia for this privilege. The Department of Natural Resources is responsible for management of Ossabaw's infrastructure and for "environmentally sound preservation, conservation and management of the Island's ecosystem."



Eleanor "Sandy" Torrey West discusses the sale of Ossabaw Island to the state of Georgia with President Jimmy Carter. Photo courtesy of Torrey West Family

Ossabaw Island Heritage Preserve

Ossabaw's Heritage Preserve designation was negotiated by the Torrey and West families as a condition of their sale of Ossabaw to the State in 1978.

The Heritage Preserve was designated on June 15, 1978 via an Executive Order by Georgia Governor George Busbee, "...to protect, conserve, and preserve the natural and cultural resources of this Island for the benefit of present and future generations, and that Ossabaw Island shall only be used for natural, scientific, and cultural study, research, and education, and environmentally sound preservation, conservation, and management of the Island's ecosystem."

TOIF: Stewards of the Heritage Preserve

The Ossabaw Island Foundation's (TOIF's) first priority and mission is to assure that all who use Ossabaw Island comply with the island's Heritage Preserve requirements of "natural, scientific or cultural education, research or study." Empowered by the Use Agreement, TOIF is tasked with sharing Ossabaw Island's story and resources, while preserving the island for future generations.



Elizabeth DuBose educates students inside a tabby cabin built in 1845.

Photo by Ben Wells

OSSABAW ISLAND FOUNDATION AND EDUCATION ALLIANCE

1998

1998 – Present. 5 year Renewable Use Agreement Signed.

On January 25, 1998 the first Use Agreement was signed between the State of Georgia's Department of Natural Resources and TOIF. Our sixth Use Agreement was signed January 31, 2023.

1998 – 2001. Ossabaw Island Comprehensive Management Plan.

Eight (8) TOIF representatives served on the steering committee and subcommittees of this DNR-led plan, adopted May 1, 2001, "to provide clear direction...in the management and protection of Ossabaw."

1998 & 2014. National Trust for Historic Preservation – National Preservation Conference Field Workshops.

Showcased Ossabaw's successes since the island's designation on the 1996 list of "America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places."



2002

2002 – 2011. Visiting Artists Program.

Hundreds of artists visited Ossabaw Island at no charge, for overnight stays or day trips. Artists continue to visit Ossabaw with independently-organized overnight groups and with TOIF creative trips.

2002 – 2011. Torrey-West Furniture Acquisition.

Purchased from the Torrey and West families original 1926 Torrey-West Estate furnishings, to remain in place.

2002 – 2013. UGA Marine Education and Georgia Youth Science & Technology Center Teacher Training Workshops. Taught coastal ecology and marine biology.



2005-07

***2005 – Present. Ossabaw Island Education Alliance.**

Created as an educational partnership between the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia, the Department of Natural Resources, and TOIF.

2006 – Present. The Art and History of Ossabaw Indigo.

Conducted historical research, identified and geno-typed Ossabaw indigo. Developed hands-on workshops and film on the history, economics, and craft of this colonial-era plant-based dye.

***2007 – 2010 Barrier Island Observatory.** Installed data collection towers, wireless internet connectivity, and weather station on Ossabaw Island.

2008

***2008 – 2010. African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry.**

This 2008 symposium featured original research presented by twelve historians on the lives of African Americans from the colonial period through the 20th century. UGA Press published a book from the conference proceedings in 2010.

***2008 – 2010 Ossabest.**

Hosted three-day stays on Ossabaw Island for public middle school students and teachers. Science and technology projects focused on the coastal ecosystem. A partnership with Armstrong State University and Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools. Funded by a \$1.2 million grant from the National Science Foundation.

2008 – 2015. Museum Artifact Conservation Course.

Led by the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works. Funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

25 YEAR TIMELINE

2009-10

***2009 – 2013, and 2017. African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry Summer Institutes.** Instructed teachers and professors on daily life for 19th-century enslaved workers. Led by Georgia Historical Society, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

***2009 & 2010. Genesis & Ossabaw Island Project Reunions.** Organized reunions for Directors and first-year Genesis members. Filmed and produced two documentaries.

***2009 & 2011. Historical Research on African American Life.** Interpreted the Ossabaw Island story of enslaved Africans and Freedmen tenant farmers. Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

***2009 – Present. The Sandy West Ossabaw Fellowship.** Since its inception, five people have been recognized for their creative endeavors related to or inspired by Ossabaw Island.



2011

2011 – Present. Ossabaw Island Writers' Retreat. Hosted independently organized spring and fall workshops featuring instruction and critique by writers in fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry.

2011 – Present. Expanded TOIF Public Education Trips. Lead turtle hatching weekends and day trips. Storytelling New Year's Eve events, creative retreats, "fee-free" Super Museum Sunday and Lift Every Voice African American history day trips.

***2011 – Present. Archaeology Field Schools and Public Days.** Excavated sites across Ossabaw Island for research and university-level field instruction. Hosted by the Universities of Tennessee, Georgia and Pennsylvania, TOIF and DNR.

2013-18

***2013 – Present. Moon River District in south Chatham County.** Created a partnership of six sites (including Ossabaw Island) to increase visitation and awareness, and educate the public about the area's common history and geography.

***2016. Textiles Society of America National Conference.** Held a field trip/workshop on the history of indigo on Ossabaw Island.

***2016 – 2020. Coastal Nature, Coastal Culture: Environmental Histories of the Georgia Coast.** Hosted a symposium featuring original research presented by twelve historians and writers on how 5000 years of people and cultures were influenced by Georgia's 100 mile coastline. Book published by UGA Press. Launched with 15 statewide events including the Decatur Book Festival. Created a virtual six part lecture series with The Learning Center at SCI.

2019-23

2019 – Present. Ossabaw Heritage Day. Annual gathering for descendants, Ossabaw families, OIP and Genesis members. A day of friendship, history and remembrance.

2019 – 2022. Butterflies of the Atlantic Flyway Alliance survey. 132 citizen-scientist volunteers counted over 7,000 migrating butterflies for the four year, 14-week survey in partnership with the DNR.

2020 – Present. Advocating for the Heritage Preserve Act. Sounded the alarm and defeated GA HB906 that threatened Georgia's Heritage Preserve Act. Worked with a network of statewide partners and President Jimmy Carter to protect Georgia's Heritage Preserves.

2022 – 2023. Island visits reach capacity. Island use reaches full capacity with 268 program days and 2900 visits in FY 2021-2022. The 2023 island calendar is full.



BEFORE



AFTER

Photos by Elizabeth DuBose

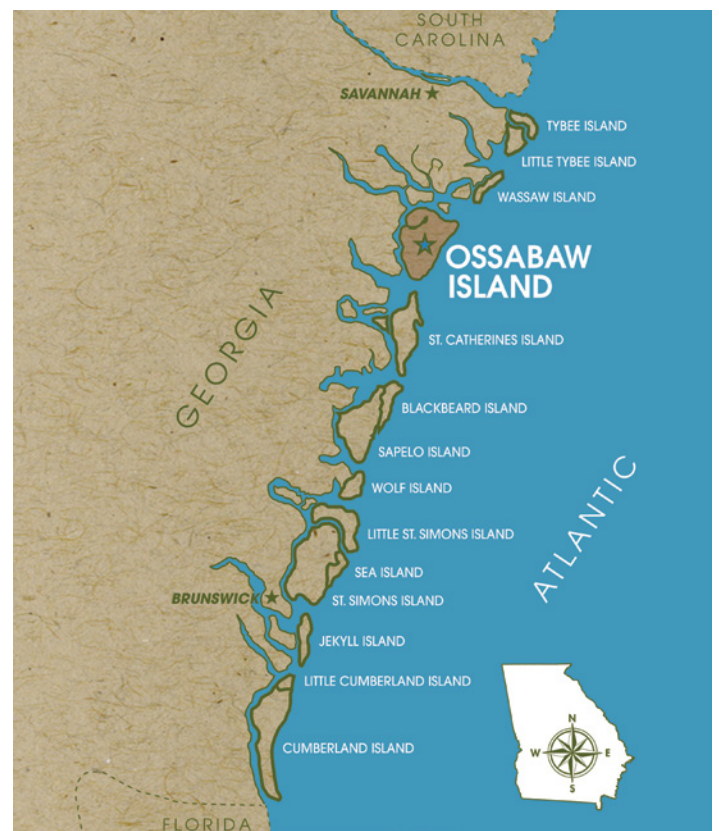
Preserving the Built Environment

Since 1998, TOIF has restored or stabilized eleven historic buildings on Ossabaw Island. Project funds (\$4.5 million) were raised from private and public foundations, federal grants and individual donations. Buildings are used to further our mission: as housing, teaching, and laboratory spaces; for photography/darkroom processing; and for historic interpretation of 19th and 20th century life on Ossabaw Island and the Georgia coast.

- 2002 - **Club House (Circa 1886)** Full rehabilitation. Received regional and state historic preservation awards.
- 2002 - **Torrey-West House (1926)** Restored terra-cotta roof. Received regional historic preservation award.
- 2005 - **Tabbies #1, #2, #3, and the Smoke House (Circa 1820-1840)** Full restoration on Tabbies 1 and 2; stabilization on Tabby 3 and Smoke House. Received Save America's Treasures national restoration grant
- 2010 - **Boarding House (1918)** Full rehabilitation. Received regional and state historic preservation awards.
- 2015 - **Abattoir (Circa 1960)** Adaptive reuse to Field Lab and Dark Room.
- 2015 - **Tower House (1979)** Replaced metal roof.
- 2015 - **Torrey-West Shop (Circa 1926)** Replaced metal roof.
- 2018 - **Little Torrey House (Circa 1955)** Replaced roof.

Torrey-West House Preservation and Renovation

Eleanor "Sandy" Torrey West's death on January 17, 2021 (her 108th birthday) ended the Torrey-West life estate. As stipulated in our Use Agreement, TOIF took responsibility for the Torrey-West house and grounds, in the same way TOIF provides access, maintenance and use of the northern half of Ossabaw Island. TOIF has been applying for Georgia Outdoor Stewardship grants, and other funds to begin the renovation of the buildings for island users. The project will expand the capacity of Ossabaw by doubling the overnight accommodations and quadrupling the meeting/classroom space capacity on the island, while preserving three historic structures.



Ossabaw Island is a 26,000-acre barrier island owned by the State of Georgia. The state's first Heritage Preserve is undeveloped and set aside by an Executive Order for natural, scientific and cultural study, research and education; and for environmentally sound preservation, conservation and management of the island's ecosystem.

The Ossabaw Island Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)3. Through a partnership with the State of Georgia, TOIF inspires, promotes, and manages exceptional educational, cultural, and scientific programs that are designed to maximize the experience of Ossabaw Island.

DONATE TODAY:



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