



Ossabaw Oracle

Vol. XIII No. 1
Spring 2008

A publication of the Ossabaw Island Foundation

“The Atlantic World...” Symposium Reveals Georgia’s African American History: Over 500 Attend Event

Over three-and-a-half days in late February, hundreds of historians from around the country--professionals and laypeople—descended on downtown Savannah for scholarly presentations, history tours, teacher workshops and events exploring coastal Georgia’s African American history.

Final tallies show that 505 people packed into the Savannah Hilton DeSoto from February 27 through March 1, for “The Atlantic World and African American Life and Culture in the Georgia Lowcountry: 18th to 20th Century” a first-ever history symposium. The symposium was sponsored and organized by The Ossabaw Island Foundation and The Ossabaw Island Education Alliance, with support from additional sponsors and underwriters.



Members of the McIntosh County Shouters entertained guests

A diverse gathering of teens to octogenarians, made up of students, history professionals and novice enthusiasts, business people, civic leaders and retirees came together for the symposium. Current and former residents of historically African American Georgia Lowcountry communities



Mayor Otis Johnson and Charles Elmore

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Take a Day Trip to Ossabaw

The Ossabaw Island Foundation is hosting another unforgettable day on Ossabaw Island.

Ossabaw Island Heritage Preserve is a living laboratory for scientists, naturalists and educators, a studio for artists and a place of inspiration for writers and thinkers.

If you have ever wondered about Ossabaw or wanted to visit, we invite you to join us.

For those willing to venture by pontoon boat, buckboard and on foot, you will see the place where the arts and sciences meet history and nature.

When:

Saturday, June 7th

- The boat departs promptly at 9:30 am and returns around 4 pm

Where:

Delegal Marina, The Landings on Skidaway Island

Cost:

\$50 per person for Friends of Ossabaw or \$65 per person for Future Friends

- Reservations are required, as space is limited.
- Payment in full is required to confirm reservations.
- Cost includes round-trip boat transportation to Ossabaw Island and the full day tour.
- Cost does **not** include your sack lunch or bottled water / beverages.
- Due to the length of the tour, this program is not recommended for children.
- Because we will be riding along unpaved roads in a wooden buckboard, this tour is not recommended for those with hip, back or knee problems.
- This tour does **not** include a tour of the Torrey-West Estate, out of respect for privacy.

For more information or to reserve space on this tour, please contact:

Jim Bitler, Foundation On-Island Coordinator at 912.210.1613 or Elizabeth DuBose, Foundation Executive Director at 912.233.5104.

Calling All Visual Artists and Fine Craftspeople

Are you a painter, a sculptor, a photographer? Perhaps a potter, a wood turner, or a weaver?

Visual artists and craftspeople of any media are invited to heed the call of the wild and nurture the muses with an Ossabaw Island adventure. For the eighth year, The Ossabaw Island Foundation offers short artist sabbaticals between June 1 and September 30, subject to availability.

Come alone or bring a group. Make it a day trip, stay one night or several. On-island coordinator Jim Bitler will provide an overview of Ossabaw’s natural and built environment, as well as transportation around the island.

Be our guests overnight in the 1890’s era Club House, restored with 21st century amenities like central air-conditioning and a full kitchen (including an espresso machine).

Transportation to and from the island is easy to coordinate--contact one of several boat captains who offer this service at a fee of about \$35 per person round trip. (We’ll provide a list of captains to choose from.) For people with their own boat, overnight mooring requires pre-approval with

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Symposium, continued from Page 1

mingled with registrants from as far away as New York, the Midwest, California, and Scotland.

“The energy of the crowd was inspiring to me. You could feel how people sensed they were participating in something exceptional – the rediscovery of Geechee Culture

and the Georgia Lowcountry,” said Paul Pressly, coordinator for the Ossabaw Island Education Alliance.

Anchoring the symposium were two days of presentations by nine internationally recognized historians, including three recipients of the Bancroft Prize, considered the most prestigious scholarly award presented each year for the best book on American history.

Historians from as far away as Cambridge University in England, and as nearby as St. Helena Island, South Carolina, presented new research, undertaken specifically for “The Atlantic World...” symposium. The

lectures explored facets of the lives of rural and urban African Americans in Georgia, both enslaved people and free

people, from colonial times through emancipation and into the 20th and 21st centuries.

Papers by the presenters will be compiled into a book to be edited by Dr. Philip Morgan

of Johns Hopkins University, the opening keynote speaker for the symposium. University of Georgia Press will publish the book in 2009.

Personal anecdotes by community members and descendants of Pinpoint, Sapelo Island, Ossabaw Island, and other historic coastal communities brought to the symposium a present-day component, connecting people in the audience with the scholarly presentations.

Outings to Ossabaw Island, a performance by the McIntosh County Shouters, and tours to African American historic sites in Savannah lent geographic context to the lecture

information. Workshops for teachers instructed and inspired educators to guide their students in oral history projects, often a key element in African American historical research. Additional sponsors for “The Atlantic World...” symposium were Georgia Historical Society, Armstrong Atlantic State University, Georgia Southern University, Savannah State University, and University of Georgia Press.

The symposium was underwritten by contributions from the following corporations and nonprofit organizations: Brasseler USA, Enmark, Georgia Humanities Council, Hodge Foundation, Longwater Advertising, and the Wormsloe Foundation.

“Thanks to our generous underwriters, the symposium tuition was free, allowing many people to attend who may not have been able to participate otherwise,” said Pressly.

Symposium registrants may request an electronic roster of all who attended by emailing to elizabeth@ossabawisland.org.

Robin Wright Gunn



Speaker Michael Gomez addresses attendees



Artists, continued from Page 1

Jim Bitler, due to limited dock space.

In return for your adventure on Ossabaw, 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 on Saturday, October 18th. The proceeds of the auction benefit the Torrey-West House Fund.

You'll also receive one complimentary ticket to the Pig Roast (a value of \$125) so that you can share with other guests a personal perspective of your work and of your experience on Ossabaw Island.

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



Turned wood and
Ossabaw Pig tooth vase
Mark Frissell

Artists Benefit TOIF

Thank you to Glenda Cason Gallery and artists Glenda Cason, Louise Eaton, Linda Wunder for the wonderful Ossabaw show that they held on St. Simons Island.

These ladies came to Ossabaw on a day trip, and were so inspired by Ossabaw and her mysteries that they created lovely paintings from their photographs. They mounted this three person show at the Glenda Cason Gallery in November 2007, and generously donated a portion of their proceeds to the Foundation.

2008 Annual Meeting : Singing, DVD Premiere, Major Grant announcement and more

On a Thursday evening in January, over 125 of the Ossabaw Island Foundation's friends and supporters gathered at the Coastal Georgia Center for the 2008 Annual Meeting. The gathering was a birthday party, a thank you celebration, and a formal kick off for new or recently-launched Ossabaw Island Foundation projects.

The night began with a reception in the lobby, plus the chance for those gathered to sign a giant custom-made birthday card, and to record video birthday greetings to Sandy West in honor of her 95th birthday. The date of this year's annual meeting, January 17, coincided with Sandy West's 95th birthday.

Although Mrs. West was celebrating the occasion at her Ossabaw Island home with family members, an impromptu telephone call at the start of the business meeting allowed her to share a few thoughts via speaker phone, and to listen in as those gathered at the Georgia Center sang a heartfelt (and off-key) rendition of "Happy Birthday."

Ossabaw Island Foundation board president Helen Downing served as emcee for the evening. The program began with the premiere of *Revealing the Voices and Mystery of Ossabaw*, an 8-minute DVD by Sally Sears, TOIF volunteer and reporter for Atlanta's WSB-TV.

Sears's presentation was followed by a short update on the \$1.2 million National Science Foundation grant, presented by Armstrong Atlantic State University's president Thomas Z. Jones. Pinpoint residents and historians Bill Haynes and Bo Bowens then gave updates on the ongoing efforts connecting the current residents of Pinpoint to the community's roots on Ossabaw Island.

Outgoing board member Patricia Barmeyer announced the inaugural Ossabaw Fellows program, which will provide a member of the artistic community the opportunity to spend a week on the island, honoring the spirit of Sandy West's renowned Ossabaw Island Project. The program is currently under development by the foundation.

Paul Pressly, coordinator of the Ossabaw Island Education Alliance, updated guests on the final preparations for the February history symposium, "The Atlantic World..."

The official business of the evening wrapped up with Helen Downing thanking outgoing board members Patricia Barmeyer, James Noyes and Herb Windom, and welcoming newly elected board members Julian Pafford and Ron Carroll.

After the meeting, the evening concluded with birthday cake in honor of Mrs. West, drawing to a close a festive night launching Ossabaw's new year.

Robin Wright Gunn



Helen Downing, Board Chair with Elizabeth DuBose, Executive Director



Julia Stacy distributes DVDs to guests



Sally Sears with outgoing board member Herb Windom



Birthday cake enjoyed by all!

New Mysteries of Middle Place Revealed

For over a century, archeologists have explored Middle Place searching for clues into the lives of the people who lived there. Through their work we know that Middle Place is Ossabaw's largest Indian settlement site and was likely used continuously for five centuries beginning around A.D. 1000. Interestingly, virtually no archeological investigation of the Middle Place's historical periods had ever been conducted.

That changed in February, 2007 when George Price of Apalchee Research Archaeological Consultants, Inc. came to the island. He and colleagues Mike Hayden and Ray Talley spent two weeks digging at Middle Place. This was the first archeological investigation to focus on the site's historic occupation and the first to employ systematic shovel testing. In all, 218 shovel tests were dug at 30 meter intervals across much of the site. Thanks to their hard work, one of

the mysteries of Middle Place has been solved and a few new ones have been revealed.

According to an 1855 plat by William Hughes, there was a "mansion" located in the field at Middle Place "adjacent to Mile Marker 3". We know Peter Henry Morel inherited Middle Place in 1778 and moved there with his family within a few years. It is assumed the mansion was built by him. The only shovel tests that yielded late 18th century artifacts were concentrated in the middle of the field. Conveniently, this area also lines up with Mile Marker 3. For the first time, we know where the mansion was located.

Three collapsed brick chimneys were known to exist in the woods along the western edge of the field. The team's shovel testing of the area showed there are actually six additional structures and they were mapped for the first time. These structures appear to have been made of wood with brick

chimneys. Interestingly, they line up with the four tabby antebellum era slave quarter ruins located in the southwest portion of Middle Place near Buckhead Creek but are separated from them by a 60 meter gap where no artifacts were recovered.

The newly mapped structures yielded the base of a bottle embossed with the date 1866. Other artifacts from the area included personal items such as medicine and soda bottles, a metal broche, part of a porcelain doll and several brass cartridge casings. These findings provide strong evidence that Freedmen established a settlement here after the Civil War and this coincides with research done recently by Allison Dorsey on Ossabaw's brief Freedmen period. Dr. Dorsey recently presented her paper, *the Great Cry of my People is Land: Ossabaw Island* at "The Atlantic World..." symposium in Savannah in February. Copies of her talk are available on DVD, see order form.

Jim Bitler



Ossabaw Island, Georgia

In early March we journeyed to a tropic, golden isle,
A wilderness of woods, called maritime and sandy dune
where strong sea winds caressed the shore—
An everchanging ring of beach whose surface bore
the endless waves of tide which cut anew each mile
of its perimeter in heat of sun and light of moon.

What wondrous sights! Creatures bedecked with fur, or scales, or shelled,
green growing things, and gray — to see them all became our quest.
rough palm fronds clattered in the breeze

as white-tailed deer peered out between dark-shadowed trees,
their branches veiled with Spanish moss, our eyes beheld
this beauty. Day and night we roamed — for loath we were to rest

Between each arm of scalloped shore the tidal marsh crept in.
Black waters flowed through cordgrass clumps where silent ibis stood —
far off, the distant sound of the sea.

Ebb tide brought fiddler crabs who danced in harmony
their graceful minuet, while eyes and toothy grin
of 'gator watched from yonder bank, beside a log of wood.

We won't forget the silver dawn, the sunrise on the beach,
the cries of seagulls as they wheeled and soared above the foam,
the marsh where salty glassworts grow,
the furry, feral swine, the ferns, the starry glow
reflected on the midnight sea so wide. Then, each
of us did love the more "this fragile earth, our island home."*

Dorothy Speck

About the Poet

Dorothy Speck wrote this poem after her second or third visit to Ossabaw, it was published in her college literary publication. She is now a professor of Biology at the same institution, Missouri Southern University.

Dorothy says, "Ossabaw made a tremendous impression on me and I have been back several times since and brought my students."

*Guilbert, Charles Mortimer, Custodian,
Eucharistic Prayer C,
The Book of Common Prayer,
The Seabury Press, 1977.

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In Memoriam: Carol Burdick, 1928-2008 Former Co-Director, Ossabaw Island Project, 1979-1982

Carol Burdick, mother, grandmother, sister, friend, mentor, naturalist, poet, pianist and longtime instructor in English at Alfred University, ended her many careers surrounded by family at her home in Alfred Station, NY, on April 12, 2008. The cause of death was pancreatic cancer, Peter Hudson, Ms. Burdick's son, said.

She is survived by many cherished family members: her three children Peter Hudson of Addison, ME; Chris Hudson of Bellingham, WA; and Anna Pool of Durango, CO; grandchildren Blake and Hill Hudson and Kavi and Kelsey Pool; her sister Judy Downey of Camp Hill, PA; and nephews Thomas and Michael Downey and nieces Peggy, Amy, and Tim Burdick. She was predeceased by her brother, Dr. Kenneth Burdick.

CB, as she was known to family and friends, was born in Salem, WV, to H. O. Burdick (professor of biology and dean of the Liberal Arts College at Alfred University) and Hannah Burdick on Aug. 8, 1928. She grew up in Alfred with fond memories of trudging up the hill to her home on Sayles Street. She often spoke of picnics and swimming at the family's pond-side retreat in nearby Alfred Station.

CB began her literary career at the age of 16, writing reviews of the Summer Stock Theatre in Westerly, RI. She graduated from Milton College, in Wisconsin, with a degree in English. She received a master's degree in education from Geneseo State (State University of New York at Geneseo) College (circa 1965) and authored four books: "Destination Unknown," a collection of poetry (Beacon Press, 1967); "Stop Calling Me Mr. Darling" (Erickson Publishing, 1988); "Woman Alone: A Farmhouse Journal" (Erickson Publishing, 1989); and "Haps and Mishaps: Sketches of a Rural Life" (Whitlock Publishing, 2008), a collection of her essays on rural living written for The Alfred Sun. In ad-

dition, her freelance articles on a variety of topics, including travel, were published by The New York Times, The Boston Globe, Readers' Digest, and Down East Magazine.

CB's professional life included teaching elementary students in Hamburg, NY (1957-66), high school English students at Yarmouth High School, in Maine (1967-973), and at Oswego, NY.



She was co-director of the Ossabaw Island Project, OIP, during its last three years, 1979-1982.

Her career at Alfred University began in the late '70s, intertwined with her work at Ossabaw, and continued to the present. At Alfred, she founded and directed "Summer Place," a colony for writers and artists, and developed "A Place in the Universe," a course focused on the study of environmental literature. Summer Place was inspired and patterned after OIP. On behalf of the University, she hosted numerous visiting authors, poets, and other notables in her former home, in the village of Alfred. Guests included the poet Seamus Heaney and novelist Annie Dillard.

She received numerous honors and awards at Alfred University: Excellence in Teaching Award (chosen by students) 1988 and 1996, Faculty Friend of the Alfred Alumni Association-1994, Omicron Delta Kappa Out-

standing Faculty Leader Award -1998, Honorary Alumna Award-1999, The Abigail Allen Award-1999, Omicron Delta Kappa Exemplary Service Award-2001.

Involved in community cultural affairs, she acted in many "Wee Playhouse" and other theater productions in Alfred. She wrote and acted in the one-woman show: "Abigail Allan of Alfred." She was arrested and briefly

jailed for resisting a proposed Allegany County nuclear waste dump near Alfred.

In recent years, friends came to her Alfred Station home for Scrabble, piano playing, and for words and ideas. With them she shared her unrelenting passion for the goodness of

people and her love of natural beauty.

On the occasion of her retirement, Ben Howard, professor emeritus of English at Alfred University, quoted Louise Bogan saying, "In a time lacking in truth and certainty and filled with anguish and despair, no woman should be shamefaced in attempting to give back to the world through her work a portion of its lost heart."

Howard has also said: "CB spoke from a moral center. As a writer, she brought an authentic, open-hearted presence to whatever she encountered. As a teacher of writing, she demanded the familiar virtues of good prose: concreteness, succinctness, and precision. But she also demanded integrity of thought and feeling. In return, she offered an empathic but objective attention that fostered the very qualities she sought".

Elaine Hardman

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, sage green shirt/dark green 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 _____
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The Atlantic World...DVDs now available at the Ossabaw Gift Shop!

The Atlantic Life and African American Life and Culture in the Georgia Lowcountry: 18th to 20th Century, a symposium sponsored by the Ossabaw Island Foundation was held in Savannah in February.

The event was an enormous success, and the Ossabaw Island Foundation is pleased to make the first three in a series of DVDs available for purchase.

Erskine Clark

"The Shun the Scrutiny of White Men: Reports on Religion from the Georgia Lowcountry and West Africa, 1843-1850"

A conjurer, a powerful mystic, hiding in the swamps along the Medway River, entices slaves to risk dangerous nighttime journeys and their master's brutal discipline to learn the secrets the conjurer could convey. On the other side of the world, a white missionary returns to Africa with his freed slaves to begin a new country, Liberia.

Across the great divides of geography, civilization and faith these two stories formed the poles of Dr. Clark's talk. He recalls a mosaic of richly diverse religious experiences, all interacting with each

other. But unlike the African priest walking confidently to the missionary and challenging his effrontery, the conjurer in the Medway Swamp was forced to hide. The Low country practice of African religion was already different, changed and becoming African American.

Allison Dorsey

The Great Cry of our People is Land: Black Settlement and Community on Ossabaw Island

After Emancipation, the Freedmen's Bureau worked to transform slaves into freed farmers working fields they were now able to own on Ossabaw Island

But Dorsey found trouble in an arrest warrant tucked away in the historic record. It held the story of a fight, with a Bowie knife and pistols, when authorities came to arrest Mustapha Shaw for contempt of authority.

In her research, she pokes at the mystery of African American land ownership on Ossabaw itself.

Why did the former slaves and newcomers who stayed on Ossabaw after Emancipation not succeed as landowners? What happened between the soldiers, the Freed-

man's Bureau and the older former slaves? The secret may lie in the Hinder Me Not Baptist Church. Its story holds valuable keys to the mystery of land ownership on Ossabaw. But where is the church itself, and its graveyard? When will we find it, and learn more?

Emory Campbell

A Sense of Self and Place: Unmasking the Mystiques of my Gullah Cultural Heritage

Former director of the Penn Center on St. Helena Island, Emory Campbell delivered the final keynote address.

In a deeply personal story, he relates the challenge of leaving the islands as a young man immersed in Gullah culture and striving to fit into the strange ways of the mainland. How he found a mask to cover his sense of self becomes a compelling story leading to one of the top universities in the nation and back to public health service on the Carolina coast. How he made the decision to unmask himself and fight to preserve a culture threatened with extinction carries important lessons. At the heart of that story lies the spirituality behind Gullah life, from a deep belief in God and worship in the Praise House.

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The Ossabaw Island Foundation

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The Dunes of Ossabaw

We walked by them...
The lovers on the beach...
The night hid our presence
and the waves silenced our passing.
There was no missing the intensity of their caresses
and the throes of their passions in the gentle falling of night.
We walked softly to honor their magic.
The lighthouse sparkled in your eyes
and the quiet laughing in your smile
echoed the warmth of younger days.
On an island, long ago,
the dunes of Ossabaw
had whispered such spells
and we, in our youth,
had listened to the ocean's love songs.
The return to our camp
passed in rich silence.
Under the amber glow of candles
the adventure returned
and I fell in love...
again.

*James Dalton Byrd
January 2005*