



Ossabaw Oracle

Revealing the voices and mystery of Ossabaw Island

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Spring 2011

A publication of the
Ossabaw Island Foundation

An Annual Affair: 2011 Annual Meeting in Review

The 2011 Ossabaw Island Foundation Annual Meeting brought together nearly 150 friends of the island for an hour of presentations and videos celebrating another successful year on the island. TOIF Board President Susie Clinard chaired the meeting, held on January 13 in the Coastal Georgia Center in Savannah. Thank you to the Robert L. Harrison family for underwriting a portion of the meeting.

TOIF board member Linda Bleicken, President of Armstrong Atlantic State University, and Dr. Deborah Mack, a national consultant on African American history and museum studies, gave short presentations on Ossabaw Island programs during 2010.

Two short films featuring the 1970 Genesis Project group were screened. The first, from 1970, was produced by the Georgia Forestry Commission, to showcase the “experiment in human ecology” that was the Genesis Project. The second film, “In the Beginning,” was produced in 2010 by the Ossabaw Island Foundation, featuring excerpts from an October 2010 round table interview session with eight original Genesis Project participants. (Check out the Forestry Commission film on the Ossabaw Island Foundation website, and the new film on YouTube.)



L-R Hanif Haynes, Board Member; Elizabeth DuBose, Executive Director; Susie Clinard, Board President; Ron Bailey, Board Member; Chris Kirkpatrick, Board Member.

At the close of the Annual Meeting, On-Island Coordinator Jim Bitler “introduced” TOIF’s new brochure. Each person at the Annual Meeting was invited to become an Ambassador for Ossabaw Island – to pass along one of the new brochures

to someone who might want to know more about Ossabaw and her importance to our culture and environment.

At adjournment, most in attendance lingered to enjoy birthday cake celebrating the 98th birthday of Ossabaw Island resident Eleanor “Sandy” West.

Thank you to departing board members Stewart Bromley

(TOIF Treasurer for the past six years), Gail Andrus, Emory Campbell, Karen Cash, and Julian Pafford (TOIF secretary for the past two years.) We also honor the outstanding service of the late Bill Haynes, who died during the last year of his term as a TOIF board member, in August 2010.

Welcome to new TOIF board members Hanif Haynes, Ron Bailey, and Chris Kirkpatrick, who also has been elected as the new TOIF treasurer. Thanks also to the newly elected TOIF board secretary, Linda Bleicken.

Special thanks to the Annual Meeting volunteers. Reception crew and ushers: Barbara Hook, Helen Mahany, Laura Schmitz, Marsha Shadley, Vicky Taylor and Katie Wysocki. Photography: Laura Hyatt. Audio/Visual Tech: Jody Schiesser.

Ossabaw Island Provides Baseline for University of Georgia Environmental Research

Ossabaw Island’s unspoiled environment is providing valuable baseline information to two scientific research projects led by the University of Georgia’s Odum School of Ecology.

“Ossabaw Island is one of the few places where resiliency of intact barrier islands to sea level rise and extreme storms can be measured,” says Dr. Ron Carroll, a professor at the Odum School and Director of UGA’s River Basin Center.

The first of Carroll’s two projects investigates “how rising sea levels will likely change the coastal landscape over the next several decades,” says Carroll.

The sea level project uses radar and satellite imagery to

measure small changes in the coast’s topography, mapping past changes and using those patterns to predict future changes. The changes are measured in increments of 30 centimeters (about 12 inches) up to the one meter rise expected by most scientists.

The research is showing that a large part of the salt marsh on the coast will convert to open water.

“All we can do is show the expected changes, but there could be various kinds of adaptations that the salt marsh makes,” says Carroll.

The two year project, funded through grants from the State of Georgia and NOAA, will be completed later this year. UGA’s Department of Geography and Butler



Wildlife Revelations: Trips to Ossabaw for Birding and Turtle-Watching

Tantalized by sea turtles? Bewitched by birds? The Ossabaw Island Foundation is sponsoring two wildlife-themed education trips to Ossabaw in April and July. They're made for turtle lovers or birders.

Bird Watching Day Trip, Saturday, April 9, 2011

Tickets are going fast for this special day traveling to several birding habitats on Ossabaw, including the beach for shore and wading birds, one or two marshland areas, wooded uplands, and a visit to the island's Wood Stork rookery. Trip attendance is limited to 18 people, allowing the group to quickly and easily get around the island. This trip is suited for novice to expert birders. Please bring binoculars if you have them.

\$50 for Friends of Ossabaw, \$70 for future Friends of Ossabaw (includes "Friend" membership).

Daytrip fees include round trip boat transportation from Delegal Marina on Skidaway Island to Ossabaw's North End, and the birding programming. Day trip participants must bring their own sack lunch and beverages.

Turtle-Watching Overnight Trip, Saturday & Sunday, July 16 -17, 2011

Learn about the biology of sea turtles with special focus on the Loggerhead sea turtle, the primary species that nests on Ossabaw Island. After an afternoon of free time on the island's North End, and an evening orientation by summer turtle project staff or volunteers, the group will venture across the island to Bradley Beach as the sun sets. Under the light of

a full moon, walk the beach in search of nesting sea turtles, with guidance from island staff and turtle project crew. While you may not find any turtles nesting, the night time beach walk is something you will never forget.

\$200 Friends of Ossabaw. \$250 for Future Friends of Ossabaw (includes "Friend" membership).

Overnight Trip fees include round trip transportation from Delegal Marina on Skidaway Island to Ossabaw Island's North End; three heat-and-serve catered meals; overnight dormitory-style accommodations in the Clubhouse on Ossabaw Island, plus the turtle program.

Trips are designed for adults and for children age 12 and over. Minors must be accompanied by a parent or supervising adult.

Space is limited for both trips. Your payment secures your reservation. To register, go to www.ossabawisland.org or call (912) 233-5104.

No Refunds. Please see the Ossabaw Island Trip Policies on our website, www.ossabawisland.org, or contact Jim Bitler for more information: jim@ossabawisland.org, or (912) 210-1613.



Digging Ossabaw: June Archeology Adventure Scheduled for Members of The Rookery



Coastal Georgia meets Indiana Jones in a unique archeology day trip adventure planned for major donors to the Ossabaw Island Foundation.

From May 16 to June 24, a team of university-level archeologists will conduct a field school on the North End of Ossabaw Island. Led by Dr. Nick Honerkamp, archeologist from University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, this five week school is jointly hosted by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the UT School of Archeology. Students at the field school are candidates for masters degrees and Ph. D.s in archeology, anthropology, and related fields.

Each year, The Ossabaw Island Foundation (TOIF) hosts a unique on-island experience designed for members of the Rookery, TOIF's giving society for donors making annual Ossabaw Fund gifts of \$1,000 or more. This year, Rookery

members are invited for a day trip to experience the hands on science of archeology on Ossabaw. This is a special one day program that has been developed solely for The Rookery.

The complimentary trip includes round trip transportation from Delegal Marina at Skidaway Island to Ossabaw's North End; catered lunch and beverages; and the archeology program.

The Rookery Archaeology Trip, Thursday, June 2, 2011

Every donation to the Ossabaw Island Foundation is critical to our financial health. Contributions to the Rookery represent over one third of TOIF's Ossabaw Fund. Join The Rookery now via our website, or contact Elizabeth DuBose, Executive Director, for more information, at (912) 233-5104, or elizabeth@ossabawisland.org.

Join The Rookery:

Where Friends of Ossabaw Flock Together.

Go to www.ossabawisland.org to join today!

One Woman's Search for her Ossabaw Family Connection

In January 2011, a Virginia woman's research into her family history brought her to the offices of the Ossabaw Island Foundation.

LaTika Johnson Lee has spent the past decade visiting Savannah several times each year, combing through documents at the Chatham County Probate Court, Georgia Historical Society, and the Bull Street Library's Genealogy Room. Her research has led her to what may be her family roots on Ossabaw Island. Lee's story reveals the rewards and difficulties experienced by many African-Americans who are looking for information on their ancestry.

Lee, a Richmond freelance writer and PR consultant, grew up in Savannah. She first crossed paths with The Ossabaw Island Foundation in 2008, when she attended the African-American history symposium hosted in Savannah by The Ossabaw Island Education Alliance. By then, Lee had done enough research to find some possible ancestors from Ossabaw Island.

In Freedmen's Bureau records from approximately 1869 – 1872, an Amos Johnson is recorded as living on Ossabaw Island. "It does list that he is mar-

ried to someone named Celia, and it has some other information," says Lee.

On Lee's grandfather's (Amos Johnson, Jr.'s) social security card application, he listed his mother's name as Rachel. In the 1880 Georgia census for Chatham County, a Rachel is listed as the wife of a man named John McKiver, who lived on Ossabaw.

Lee believes that Amos Johnson and Rachel McKiver of

Ossabaw Island are her great grandfather and great grandmother—that Rachel McKiver later married Amos Sr. and that they were the parents of Lee's grandfather, Amos Jr. Documenting that belief is Lee's current challenge.

During the 2008 symposium, Lee took a tour of Ossabaw Island. "It was my first

time on the boat, it was my first time seeing the dolphins, and when we got to the island it was homecoming."

During Lee's January 2011 visit to our offices, she discussed her progress with Paul Pressly of the Ossabaw Island Education Alliance. "She's done her homework," says Pressly. "We recommended the Freedmen's Bank records, which are not that commonly used."

What next steps are available to Lee as she continues her research? There are the records from the South End plantation on Ossabaw and the 1860 Census. "The 1870 census is too shaky," says Pressly, "People rarely cite it for the simple reason that it's so muddy."

"There are a lot of African Americans like me who get to 1870 and hit a brick wall," says Lee, "I'm at my brick wall." She is determined to keep looking and asking questions of people in and around Savannah because she believes that she will find answers: "Somebody has to know something!"



LaTika Lee reviews marriage records in the Chatham County Probate Court.

Environmental Research, Continued from Page 1

University's Urban Ecosystem Center in Indiana are also participating in the project.

"When you see what the differences are [in projected sea level rise and water coverage over the next thirty years] it is quite shocking, actually."

The second of the two research projects "examines development trends and projections, attempting to provide [coastal] communities with estimated market and non-market values of their changing landscape."

This two-to-three year project began in mid 2010. "In its first year we are working on valuation of timberlands in Macintosh County," says Carroll. "We anticipate using Ossabaw as a way of

assessing the value of an intact barrier island within the coastal environment. In the future, we'll be measuring the difference in erosion in the protected zone on Ossabaw and nearby coastal mainland with the rates of erosion on parts of the mainland that are not protected by barrier islands."

"The real value for us for Ossabaw is it is basically a reference island," says Carroll. "Especially regarding the second project.

We can measure a component of the value of the island by showing how much an intact island protects the environment and economic activity of the adjacent coast."



A goal of the second project is to assist with land use planning and economic development projections. "Economists are becoming more ecologically aware," says Carroll, "recognizing the inherent dependence of the economy on the earth's ecosystem.

"Climate and economic change models based on strong research foundations now give us a view of the future that was denied to previous generations," says Carroll. "Ossabaw Island

provides the reference for estimating the value of natural environments for protecting coastal economies."

For more information visit www.rivercenter.uga.edu/research/climate/slr.htm

Our Generous Supporters

Thank you to the following Friends of Ossabaw, who contributed to The Ossabaw Island Foundation since the publication of our December 2010 newsletter. Names in **bold type** indicate first-time Friends.

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Artists on Ossabaw

By Betsy Cain

Artists belong on Ossabaw Island. Somewhere it is written.

It was written large in the minds of Sandy and Clifford West when they initiated the Ossabaw Island

Project, inviting artists of all stripes to Ossabaw to "experience" the island that they owned with Sandy's family. It was a visionary experiment that was shaped by the experiment itself, echoing and recognizing the creative process.

And it continued, branching out into the Genesis Project, written now as another creative legacy for this remarkable island.

It continues today with the Foundation's Visiting Artist Program and I have been



a beneficiary of this exchange for many years. I also work on behalf of the Foundation to bring artists to Ossabaw, an effort that brings me great pleasure. I say to these artists, "Now, Ossabaw is yours. It will inhabit you."

What happens when artists come to Ossabaw? Space and time become altered, perceptions stretch into the vastness of the vistas on Willows Road, sharpen under the dripping canopy of the maritime forest and move with the tidal flux and flow on South Beach. As Sandy West says, "There is room for thought here."

Visual thought is different. It is not logical thinking, it is awareness. What I have found on Ossabaw Island is a deep

echo of the totality of life. I experience a prescient feeling that I know this place, despite the continual sense of discovery. This feeling resides in a collective memory of landscape as it was, as it has always been. It is almost inexplicable.

There is a pulse of the unknown on this island, ripe territory for the creative soul. Ossabaw offers the strata of history combined with dense visual and audible experience. It invades my painting as a palpable energy. I take Ossabaw with me into the studio.

And it is written. Artists belong on Ossabaw.

Elizabeth "Betsy" Cain is a nationally acclaimed painter and mixed-media artist living and working in Savannah. She serves on the Ossabaw Island Foundation Culture Committee and has organized nearly a dozen groups of visual artists to come to Ossabaw as part of the Visiting Artists Program. betsycain.com, ossabawislandart.com

Education

OssaBEST

Armstrong Atlantic State University completed a three-year campus and on-island program of science and technology for Chatham County public school teachers and middle/high school students. Funded by a \$1.2 million National Science Foundation grant.

Professor and Teacher Training Workshops

Training was provided to 133 school and university teachers and professors from across the United States in the fields of ecology, natural history and other sciences, and African American history and culture; through programs offered by the Georgia Historical Society, the University of Georgia Marine Education Center and Aquarium, the University of Tennessee, and the Georgia Youth Science and Technology Centers.

Day and Overnight Trips

Shared Ossabaw Island with hundreds of adults through day trips and overnight immersion programs organized by The Ossabaw Island Foundation (TOIF), universities, special interest groups, or individuals.

Science

Barrier Island Observatory (BIO)

Installed two 100-foot towers on Ossabaw Island for transmitting scientific data in real time via the internet. Installed solar powered electronic data collection equipment at two new sites on the island and upgraded equipment at two existing sites. Technical support for construction provided by Hussey, Gay, Bell and DeYoung. Technology planning and implementation provided by Seimitsu. BIO funding provided by Georgia Power.



Culture

Torrey West House Interiors Conservation



University of Delaware, Winterthur Museum and Colonial Williamsburg interiors professionals and students conducted an interior furnishings and textiles

assessment, and developed a conservation plan and “Best Practices” maintenance guidelines for the Torrey West House.

Visiting Artists Program

Continued and expanded this successful TOIF program that provides visual artists the opportunity to create work on Ossabaw Island. Thirty-five artists participated in FY 2009-2010.

Film on Ossabaw Island

Three film projects were completed in 2010 on Ossabaw Island: *The Four Coursemen*, a Cooking Channel pilot program; the 1970 Genesis Reunion roundtable discussion; and a Savannah College of Art and Design film project.



History & Historic Preservation

Oral Histories

Recorded recollections of members of the 1970 Genesis Project during their 40 year reunion on Ossabaw Island.

African American History Book

Facilitated the publication of *African-Americans and the Georgia Lowcountry: The Atlantic World and the Gullah Geechee* in March 2010 by UGA Press. Sponsored public lectures by contributor Emory Campbell in Savannah and at

the Decatur Book Festival. The book won the 2010 Georgia Historical Records Advisory Board Award for Excellence in Documenting Georgia’s History.

Boarding House

In partnership with Savannah College of Art and Design, furnished the 1918-era Boarding House on Ossabaw Island’s North End, expanding overnight accommodation on the island to 32 people, with an eye toward longer-term stays.



Received the 2010 Historic Preservation Excellence Award from the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation.

History

Received a \$40,000 planning grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to interpret the history and culture of African Americans who lived as enslaved people and freedmen on Ossabaw Island from 1760 to 1890.

Governance

Partnerships

About 85% of island programming is “partners based”; including public and private universities, public and private elementary and secondary schools; state government; and non-profit environmental, research and cultural organizations. Collaboration and support throughout the year provided by the Department of Natural Resources and The Board of Regents of the State of Georgia.

Looking Ahead

Identified key goals for the next five years and completed our second five year strategic plan (2011-2015).

Communication

Launched new website, www.ossabawisland.org, in collaboration with Longwater & Co. Expanded outreach via e-newsletter and Facebook.

Summary & Accomplishments, continued from Page 5

Special Events

Record-breaking attendance at the 2010 Annual Meeting and at the 2010 Pig Roast, featuring an auction of artwork contributed by Visiting Artist Program participants, longtime friends of Ossabaw Island, new artist friends, and former Genesis Project members.

Financial Performance

Since becoming a non-profit organization in 1998, TOIF has raised over \$4.1 million for infrastructure improvements and for exceptional educational, cultural and scientific programming. In 2010, we continued our long history of financial stability and diversity of funding sources. For the eighth consecutive year TOIF ended the fiscal year in the black. For the sixth consecutive year we conducted an audit of financial statements. In FY 2009-2010, total revenues were \$373,000, with total expenses of \$335,000.



Guests enjoy lunch on the lawn at the 2010 Art Auction and Pig Roast

The Wanamaker Connection to Ossabaw Island

By Paul Pressly

History can be a strange business. The Ossabaw Island Foundation has always taken pride in double-checking its facts and giving visitors a lively but accurate portrayal of life on Ossabaw Island over the past two hundred years. The starting points for historic interpretation are the deeds of ownership and conveyances of title that transferred land. We have always held deeds to be sacrosanct and indeed they are, but we also discovered that they convey only a part of the story.

John Wanamaker, the department store magnate of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, built a retailing empire based in Philadelphia. Historical records prove that John Wanamaker purchased most of Ossabaw in 1895 and sold it in 1906 after eleven years of ownership. That fact has always been a source of pride and wonderment.



John Wanamaker

Wanamaker can claim to be one of the originators of the idea of department stores and, while building his “Moving Pageant of Merchandise,” also served as Postmaster General of the United States, founded a Sunday School with five thousand people, and brought the Y.M.C.A. to cities around the world. It has always been fun for us to imagine Wanamaker stalking through the late 19th century Clubhouse on Ossabaw’s North End on his way to a hunt, before heading back to Philadelphia and a circle of friends that included President Benjamin Harrison.

In 2010 I ordered a biography on Wanamaker to see if archives existed that might give us a description of Ossabaw at the turn of the century. The back of the title page listed where the author, the Reverend William Allen Zulker, lived, and a quick visit to whitepages.com put me in contact with him. Delighted to be of help, Zulker set me straight. John Wanamaker never had any direct contact with Ossabaw Island. In Zulker’s research through one hundred cartons of letters and memoranda, he found nothing refer-

ring to our coastal Georgia treasure.

It turns out that John’s son, Thomas B. Wanamaker, arranged for his father to buy the island so that he could use it for hunting and recreational purposes. As son of an illiterate brickmaker, John had sent young Thomas to Princeton for his education. As a Princeton Tiger alum, I was delighted to learn that a Princetonian had been in charge of Ossabaw, but a little crestfallen to know that Thomas was something of a playboy--an early version of a character out of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s fiction. Thomas became ill and sold the island in 1906, two years

before he died. The elder Wanamaker died 14 years after Thomas, in December 1922.



Thomas B. Wanamaker

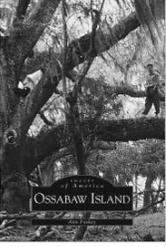
So our great story about Ossabaw’s connections with the Wanamaker fortune will have to be scaled down. But at least we have a better perspective on how northern families saw the Georgia

coast, and know the Clubhouse was used by hardy souls ready for the early morning hunt.

Dr. Paul Pressly is Director of the Ossabaw Island Education Alliance.

The Ossabaw Gift Shop

Featured this quarter in the Ossabaw Gift Shop:



Ossabaw Island, by Ann Foskey, an Images of America pictorial history book in soft cover. Now in its fourth printing! This 2001 book features reprints of historic maps dating to the early 18th century, and photographs from public records as well as the private collections of the Torrey and West family.

Also available in the Ossabaw Gift Shop:

T-shirts and totes feature the Ossabaw bone yard tree in blue at sunrise, on an off-white organic cotton. Designed by Longwater & Company.

Evocations of an Island hardcover coffee table book, photography by Jack Leigh, artwork by Alan Campbell, narrative by James Kilgo. Also available: Box of eight (8) note cards featuring four Jack Leigh images from the book.

The God of the Hinge: Sojourns in Cloud Cuckoo Land, by Elizabeth Pool and Eleanor "Sandy" West. Follow the amazing adventures of two remarkable women as they travel the world over the course of 70 years.

African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry: The Atlantic World and the Gullah Geechee, UGA Press hardcover book, examining 250 years of coastal Georgia African American history and culture.

Bradley Beach, poster of William Armstrong painting.

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Ossabaw Island has the Write Stuff

Eight novelists, poets and essayists attended workshops, writing seminars and nightly readings during the inaugural Ossabaw Island Writers' Retreat on Ossabaw Island in mid-February.

"These past four days have changed my life," says Allison Adams, a writer/artist and mother of four who traveled from Birmingham, Alabama, and rediscovered her dream of becoming a novelist. "To spend time with other writers in this setting has helped me to understand that I'm not alone. I can belong in the world as a writer."

The four day/ three night retreat, held in the Clubhouse and the Boarding House on Ossabaw's North End, was organized by Dr. Tony Morris, professor of English at Armstrong Atlantic State University and managing editor of the *Southern Poetry Review*. Instructors for the workshop were memoirist Beverly Donofrio, poet Cathy Smith Bowers, and fiction writer Leonore Hart.



Participants in the first Ossabaw Island Writers' Retreat.

"Participants were strongly affected by the beauty and serenity of the island," says Morris. "They commented on the spirit, tone and mood of the retreat—particularly the near-magical presence and sense of natural and human history locked into a place 'that time forgot.'"

Morris had high praise for Jim Bitler, "the consummate coordinator and facilitator," and for Roger Parker, "whose barbecue dinner on opening night set just the right tone for the next four days—we salute you!"

Tentative plans are under way for a 2012 writers' retreat. Those attending suggested that future retreats be extended by a day to provide more opportunities for exploring the island.

"We hope this will be the beginning of a long and lasting cooperative relationship between our organizations," says Morris.

New Genesis Project Film—Now on YouTube!

Check out the short film *In The Beginning: Reflections on Year One: The Genesis Project*, a conversation with eight members of the original 1970 Genesis Project group. Filmed on Ossabaw Island in October 2010 and premiered at the

Ossabaw Island Foundation 2011 Annual Meeting.

Go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7IOz83qnW4 or search YouTube for "Ossabaw" and "Genesis."

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Eleanor T. West

Executive Director

Elizabeth DuBose

Ossabaw Island Education Alliance Director
Paul Pressly

The Ossabaw Island Foundation

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**Save the Date! Upcoming Ossabaw
Island Foundation Events**

Saturday, March 26, 2011

Gullah Geechee Day Trip. Some last minute tickets available at press time. Call 912-233-5104 or check www.ossabawisland.org for information.

Saturday, April 9, 2011

Birding Day Trip. (Details on page 2)

Thursday, June 2, 2011

Island Day Trip for Members of The Rookery, our Major Giving Society. Dig in the Dirt and uncover Ossabaw history, as part of the Archeology Field School on the North End! (Details on page 2)

Saturday, July 16 – Sunday, July 17, 2011

Turtle Watching Overnight Trip
(Details on page 2)

Saturday, October 15, 2011

Tenth Annual Ossabaw Pig Roast and Art Auction
Sponsorship opportunities available now!
Contact us at 912-233-5104.

For more detailed information about any upcoming event, go to www.ossabawisland.org.

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.

