

OSSABAW ISLAND FOUNDATION 20 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

The Ossabaw Island Foundation 1998-2018

Two Decades of Sharing and Preserving Ossabaw Island

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.” As we celebrate two decades of accomplishments, we look ahead to continuing the legacy of Ossabaw Island stewardship established by Eleanor “Sandy” Torrey West from 1961 - 1994.



Eleanor “Sandy” Torrey West at the Ossabaw Island historical marker dedication (2003). Photo by Elizabeth DuBose

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

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 visitors inside a historic tabby cabin. Photo by Julian Buckmaster

OSSABAW ISLAND FOUNDATION 20 YEAR TIMELINE



1998

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 Workshop. 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
2007

***2005. 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 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.

*Denotes Education Alliance projects.



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.

2009 2010

***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. Genesis & Ossabaw Island Project directors' reunion.** Conducted oral history interviews, and filmed a documentary.

***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.

2010. Genesis Project. Organized first-year participants' 40th reunion and produced *In the Beginning* documentary.



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-hosted trips. Led Turtle Hatching Weekends, Stargazing and Storytelling New Year's Eve Trips, Creative Retreats, Birding Trips, "fee free" day trips for Super Museum Sunday and Lift Every Voice African American history day.

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



2013 2018

***2013 – Present. Moon River District.** 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.

***2016 – 2018. 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. UGA Press will publish a book from the conference proceedings in July 2018.



Photos by Elizabeth DuBose

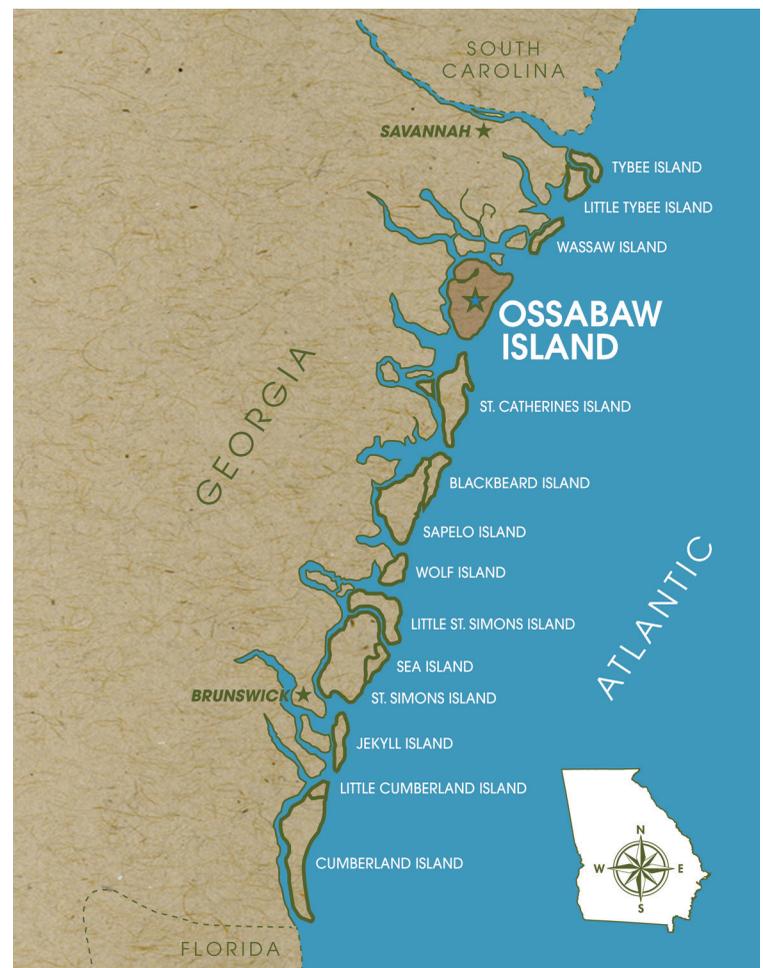
Revealing the Voices and Mystery of Ossabaw Island

Since 1998, TOIF has hosted thousands of visitors on Ossabaw Island through programs created by TOIF or in collaboration with our partners. Thousands more have learned about Ossabaw through programming held on the mainland, including history symposia, public lectures, our annual meetings, and lifelong learning courses. Programming themes include Native American life as revealed through archaeology; the history of enslaved people and freedmen on Ossabaw Island; and Ossabaw Island's indigo, loggerhead turtles, coastal ecology, hurricane history, and more.

Preserving the Built Environment

Since 1998, TOIF has restored or stabilized ten 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.

- **Club House - Circa 1886** - (Full rehabilitation. Received regional and state historic preservation awards.)
- **Torrey-West House - 1926** - (Restored terra-cotta roof. Received regional historic preservation award.)
- **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)
- **Boarding House - 1918** - (Full rehabilitation. Received regional and state historic preservation awards.)
- **Abattoir - Circa 1960** - (Adaptive reuse to Field Lab and Dark Room.)
- **Tower House - 1979** - (Replaced metal roof.)
- **Torrey-West Shop - Circa 1926** - (Replaced metal roof.)



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.

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