

The Altamaha Echoes

The Lower Altamaha Historical Society

December 18, 1986 P. O. Box 1405, Darien, Georgia 31305 Vol. I, No. 3.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

IN recent times, Georgians have been asking themselves two questions. One is: what value do old buildings have for a community? The other is: how vital is the role of an Area Planning and Development Commission (CAPDC) historic preservation planner in efforts to preserve historic sites, structures or buildings?

Both issues were discussed in some detail in November during statewide hearings chaired by Senator Glenn Bryant. The purpose was to assess the economic and social impact of historic preservation, with a view to securing funds for the continuation of APDC historic planners' work. The hearings were held after dismay was expressed in the Coastal area at the curtailment of funds for APDC technical assistance in activities such as surveying and listing an area's historic assets, obtaining their official recognition (e. g. Darien's Columbus and Vernon Squares and The Ridge being put on the National Register), helping owners restore old buildings and integrating them into an overall plan so that the whole community can benefit from these resources.

McIntosh County was represented at both the Savannah and Brunswick hearings by Darien Mayor Scotty Rogers, together with Bill Haynes. They and the other speakers emphasised both the key role of APDC historic planners and the value of old buildings to a community. Participants spoke of experiences in historic preservation—achieving National Register status (with, in the case of income-producing structures, accompanying tax incentives), restoring homes in an historic district or renovating and revitalizing downtown business areas through Main Street programmes. Each speaker underlined the importance of structures of historical note as a community asset. Proven financial benefits of historic preservation are more jobs and opportunities, more tourist dollars spent, larger healthier tax digests, better uses of old buildings... Intangible advantages loom just as large—a greater spirit of community pride, awareness and cooperation and a clear statement to all residents and any visitor (tourist or possible investor) that that particular community cares deeply about its past, its present and its future, its surroundings and its quality of life. In other words, potentially powerful, positive statements about an area.

McIntosh County has already begun to recognize the value of buildings telling of its past and heralding its future. The National Register status of the Darien Squares and The Ridge came after a CAPDC inventory of the County's historic buildings. This designation of The Ridge helped Holly Dean banish the cobwebs from the Tyson house and have Jim Lawrence carefully restore this Victorian East Lake home to its former elegance. Linda Miller and Shiela Parker are expending great and successful efforts to restore the old Patelidas building in Darien and to make "McIntosh Square" a revitalized downtown area with antique shop, inn and tearoom.

There are many valuable historic resources in McIntosh County—Darien's waterfront, old homes throughout the County, public structures big and small, Fort King George and other historic sites, Butler Island, Sapelo, the ballast piles... Is it not per-

haps time to consider these resources as a catalyst, as a means of enhancing residents and visitors' appreciation and enjoyment of this community and attracting more economic activity to McIntosh County?

For more detailed information on the multiple positive benefits of individual or community historic preservation efforts, the following people are of great assistance and wisdom:

Historic planner Maggie O'Connor, at Coastal Area Planning & Development Commission; 127 F Street, Brunswick, Ga. 31520. Tel. 912-264-7363

Chairman Harry Chapman, Coastal APDC Advisory Council for Historic Preservation; P. O. Box 72, Ludowici, Ga. 31316. Tel. 912-545-2391

Main Street Coordinator Frank McIntosh, at Georgia Department of Community Affairs; 40 Marietta Street, Atlanta, Ga. 30303

Executive Director Greg Paxton, Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation Rhodes Hall, 1516 Peachtree Street, N. W. Atlanta, Ga. 30309

WHITESIDES DIARY EXCERPTS

Through the generosity of McIntosh resident, Mr. Conrad Rogers, the diaries of his mother-in-law, Mrs. Daniel Legare Whitesides, were lent to the Editor. These journals cover the period 1947-1965, chronicling in elegant style life in Darien, events in the County and those further afield. Some excerpts from these diaries follow:

January 31, 1948: This has been (and still is) a terrible winter. It's been awfully cold all over the country and due to fuel oil and gas heating systems being so widely used, a fuel shortage (acute) has resulted. In Detroit all factories, automobile included, have been shut down to allow the fuel for heating homes. It is being felt here too, as many have fuel stoves and butane radiators. On top of the cold, it continues to rain! We've had an entire week of it.... The woods are so full of water (Conrad) can't cut the necessary logs to keep operating (his sawmill)... Butler's Island (under lease to local people) is unable to put in any crops. There will be no lettuce this year. The fields are full of water.

March 17, 1948: The old brick Mansfield building at the foot of the highway bridge is being torn down. It's been there ever since I can remember; in fact, I believe it was standing when my father came to Darien in 1876.

August 2, 1949: At a public sale today, Butler's and Champney's Islands were bought by R. J. Reynolds, for the sum of \$42,500.

August 16, 1948: Side walks are being torn up from the Court House to the bridge in order to widen the highway. Robert Young is tearing down the old house back of his filling station.... It has gone down until nothing but a wreck and a fire hazzard.

January 1, 1950: The new year came in with very little fanfare. The headlines in paper are "Troubled world hopefully greets new year." Prices are high. Coffee nearly a dollar a pound, due to short crops in Brazil. New York is experiencing a water shortage. It's generally agreed that the past 50 years have brought more scientific changes than in any other known era. Personally, I well remember the first automobile in Darien (rather a "Locomotive"), the second in Georgia, I believe. I recall how its passing, like a locomotive, would virtually upset the entire school, as the children ran to the windows to see the sensational thing, owned by Arthur Konetsko. Many a horse tried to climb a tree when it passed. It was considerably later that Darien had electric

lights—kerosene lamps were used. To me then, the airplane, radio, moving pictures are all of my lifetime....

June 24, 1950: Census figures reveal McIntosh County to be one of three in this district with an increase of 1,000 or more population since the 1940 census. Then the population 5,292, 1950—6,007.

November 16, 1951: Darien's new municipal airport which has been under construction for several months, is completed and has been accepted by the Civil Aeronautics Administration. It's to be designated "Edenfield" after Mose Edenfield. (then Mayor of Darien)

April 14, 1952: A new highway is being paved to Lower Bluff to Fort King George Site. This is to attract tourists, they say!

September 17, 1954: The beautiful old Oglethorpe Oak near the Court House has split and over half of it fallen, almost completely destroying the tree. It made a mighty crash! Fortunately it happened at night or someone on the highway would doubtless have been injured. This is the tree, which according to tradition, General Oglethorpe slept beneath upon his visit to the Highlanders in 1736.

May 2, 1957: Frank and Charles Durant (Alex Durant's sons) and C. A. Stebbins are leaving this week for Belem, Brazil via shrimp boat. They plan to clear Ft. Myers or Key West. This is the first shrimp boat to sail so far. They plan on delivering the boat to a shrimp fishery—the trip will take two weeks.

The Lions Club which has been working towards a swimming pool near the schoolhouse, have reached their goal which is \$7,500. By raising this sum, R. J. Reynolds contributed an additional \$6,000. Work will be started at once.

The John Harrods have just completed a tourist "motel" on Highway 17. It is named the "Fort King George."

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November 1, 1961: I had an unique experience this afternoon. I attended the Blessing of the Gates by the Episcopal rector. A beautiful iron fence has been placed around St. Andrews Cemetery due to an inheritance from Randolph Spalding's estate. The lovely gates were closed until the "blessing" was concluded, then they were opened. Most impressive.

May 21, 1963. Last night, a severe thunderstorm; lightning struck the Oglethorpe Oak... Am afraid this is the end of the old tree.

BOOK REVIEW

Swamp Water and Wire Grass / Historical Sketches of Coastal Georgia. George A. Rogers and R. Frank Saunders, Jr. Mercer University Press. 1984. 253 pp.

A collection of essays about the Georgia coast offering vignettes of people, ideals and events which have shaped today's world south of the Ogeechee River. The Midway settlement, Liberty County notables such as the Rev. Charles Colcock Jones, botanist Stephen Elliott or... Henry Ford, agriculture from plantation to small farm, martial spirit and chivalry in Coastal Georgia... each essay provides insights into this "Southern" world.

FUTURE PROGRAMMES

7:30 p. m. on the 3rd Thursday, at the Courthouse, Darien

15th Jan. 1987: Mr. Joe Shinnick of Brunswick-Glynn County Regional Library will present a film on William Bartram whose journeys in the 1770s celebrated this region and its flora.

19th Feb. Saul Rubin, Rabbi Emeritus of Micke Israel Synagogue of Savannah and author of a history of the Jewish people in Georgia, will present a talk on the early Jewish settlers in Coastal Georgia.

19th March Dr. Del Presley of Georgia Southern College, Statesboro, will give an illustrated talk on "Remembering Project Raft along the Altamaha River."

16th April Ms. Anne Shelander, Director of the Museum of Coastal History on St. Simons Island, will talk about the Museum's important exhibition entitled "Not soon forgotten: Cotton planters and plantations of the Golden Isles, 1784-1812."

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