

# The Altamaha Echoes

The Lower Altamaha Historical Society

October 23, 1988 P. O. Box 1405, Darien, Georgia 31305 Vol. II, No. 4.

## THE DEDICATION OF THE BLOCKHOUSE AT FORT KING GEORGE

THIS issue of *Altamaha Echoes* is devoted to announcing the completion of the replica of Colonel John Barnwell's Blockhouse (1721), its dedication, and opening to the public, at Fort King George Historic Site, on Sunday, October 23rd, 1988.

Originated by the Lower Altamaha Historical Society, and in cooperation with the Georgia General Assembly, and the Department of Natural Resources, the reconstruction of the blockhouse represents a remarkable achievement in participation.

### SCHEDULE OF DEDICATION EVENTS

- 1:00 p. m. Military Band commences playing at the Welcome Center  
2:00 Band and Troops march from Welcome Center to the Fort  
2:15 March past at the Fort Site  
Troops and Guests assemble at the Graves Site

#### NATIONAL ANTHEMS

*God Save The Queen*


*The Star Spangled Banner*

The Very Reverend Dean Charles Hay conducts the graveside service assisted by the Reverend Stephen Barnwell

Rifle Salute

Piper plays the Scottish Weid "Flowers of the Forest"

- 2:35 Band and troops move to Fort Replica

*Schedule continued over leaf* 

#### SCHEDULE OF DEDICATION EVENTS

- 2:45 SPEECHES: Mr. Marion Ricker, President, L. A. H. S.  
Mr. Ken Akins, Fort Superintendent  
Mr. O. R. Cothran, III, Director, Parks and Historic Sites, Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
Lieutenant Colonel David H. A. Shephard, Queens Regiment, Military Liason Officer for Her Majesty's Government
- 3:15 Colonel Shephard declares the Fort "open"  
British Union Jack (1721) raised  
Cannon fires  
Muskets fire from the Fort  
Fighter Planes fly over
- 3:35 Ceremony ends, and Band continues playing, and program of pageantry begins
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#### HOW IT ALL HAPPENED

The dedication of the blockhouse at Fort King George is an important event for both Darien and the Lower Altamaha Historical Society. The drive for funds to restore the fort was originated and led by the Society. The purpose in founding the LAHS (1980) was to support improvements at Fort King George Site, namely, reconstruction of the fort as a priority.

About 1912 a Lewis family settled in McIntosh County. There was a daughter, named Bessie, and as a young woman she taught school, as some of us can testify to receiving instruction from her. This was the time of the "Florida Boom," and interest was focusing on the Georgia Coast, which fired Miss Bessie's curiosity about the County's past. She interviewed the older citizens for what they could remember, and she began serious study of regional history. She combed the pages of the early newspapers, the *Colonial Records of Georgia*, and those of the Colony of South Carolina. Miss Bessie found 18th century charts and maps showing a Fort King George (1721) at the mouth of the Altamaha River. A surprise, for this was prior to the Scottish settlement of Darien (1736), and unknown to most people. The British Record Office in London furnished from its files a plan of this fort by the hand of its builder, Col. John Barnwell, and the subsequent plans for repairs by military engineers.

Col. John Barnwell's Journal is his Report to Governor Francis Nicholson, the first Royal Governor of the Colony of South Carolina. In it he describes the situation regarding his scoutmen, and his method of constructing the blockhouse at the Fort. It was found in the records of the "Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts." The Library of Congress obtained a copy, and it was published in the October, 1926 issue of the *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*. It is not so strange to have found this document in the SPGFP's files. A strong missionary feeling toward the American Indian was prevailing, inspiring many English clergymen, and there was a movement also to help their own destitute people. This was the



motivation for the Georgia Colony; certain members of its Board of Trustees were also members of the SPGFP. The need for reliable information on the area was vital to their plans. The source of the Journal was probably the agency managing colonial affairs, or even Governor Nicholson himself.

Miss Bessie was building a reputation of respect by her articles on the Scots of Darien, Oglethorpe, and her persistent enthusiasm for the reconstruction of Fort King George could no longer be ignored. Recognizing the Fort's significance, in 1948 the site was relinquished by the Sea Island Company to the State of Georgia. Archaeologists uncovered the graves of British soldiers, establishing that the fort site was indeed nearby. Vestiges of earthworks visible to William Bartram in 1773 had been obliterated by the timber industry's century of occupation on the site.

The Darien Jaycees expressed interest, but it was beyond their resources. At this point Dr. William Tailer proposed forming a Chamber of Commerce as an organized base for pressuring the State to reconstruct the fort to attract visitors. A large delegation from Darien, headed by Miss Bessie Lewis, Dr. Tailer and Jimmy Williamson, attended upon Governor Sanders, and obtained a matching grant to be administered by the Georgia Historical Commission toward the site development. The full \$25,000. could not be met, but even so the Governor gave the promised money. Additional funds were made available, and the Chairman and Director of the Historical Commission met with interested citizens at Darien. It was agreed on a museum and a dwelling for a resident superintendent for the first construction, and the replica of the fort to follow at a later time. With these two buildings accomplished, the site was officially opened to visitors.

The Historical Commission was dissolved, and management of the system of historic sites was transferred to Parks Division of DNR, which lacking experience in historic site management, put them on hold.

McIntosh County tried again in 1983, at the celebration of Georgia's 250th anni-

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### LOWER ALTAMAHA HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

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| ( ) Libraries \$25.            | ( ) Family \$15.     |
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versary, but was unsuccessful in raising the kind of funding needed to build the blockhouse. It was a bad year financially for all, and the foundations and corporations were unresponsive. As alternate a history of Darien and the Coast in dramatic form called *Origins* was performed, made possible by a Humanities matching grant through the Georgia Committee for the Celebration.

True to its stated purpose, to promote improvements at Fort King George, LAHS had kept constant pressure upon those in authority. "Investment," it said, "in the potentials of the site would surely increase revenues. An exhibit mounted in the museum outlining long-term planning for the future, would arouse beneficial interest in Legislators, Foundations, and Corporations, as worthy of notice for financial response by this show of commitment on DNR's part." This investment in Fort King George is a test of that claim. There is a risk in positive action, but it may advance Darien as the Coastal Center for Historic Tourism.

Observing the growing interest in Historic Preservation, LAHS decided 1987 was the year ripe for trying again. A committee was appointed for this major effort. The resourceful chairman, A. Rundle Cook, suggested a new approach. Consequently, a letter to Commissioner J. Leonard Ledbetter, proposing that LAHS undertake a drive to raise \$50,000., if DNR will accept these funds, add what is needful, and proceed to build the replica of blockhouse and fort. Means for broad community participation representatives. The success of this project owes much to Senator Glenn E. Bryant was provided to express approval of this project where it counted, to their legislative and response of the other Legislators that money for the blockhouse was available to DNR to carry it through. We are indebted to Ed Rowley, architect, for the authenticity of his design for the "post and beam" framing supporting Col. Barnwell's concept for the blockhouse. LAHS's thanks go to all who contributed, especially to Mr. Cook for bringing to a successful conclusion his difficult assignment. Bill Haynes.

**LAHS BLOCKHOUSE FUND:** Please send donations (tax-deductible to the extent allowable by law) to: Mrs. Lillian Schaitberger, Treasurer, Lower Altamaha Historical Society, Box 691, Darien, Georgia. 31305.

**MEETINGS OF LAHS** are held at 7:30 p. m. on the 3rd Thursday of every month at the Courthouse, Darien.

**PROGRAM COMMITTEE:** Ken Akins, Bill Haynes, and William Merriman  
**FUTURE PROGRAMS**

October 20: Ms. Jane Landers - Doctoral Candidate, University of Florida. Historian for the archaeological dig at Fort Moosa where the Darien Scots were overrun by the Spanish and their black confederates in 1739. She hopes to bring an item or two which originated in Darien...the men of McIntosh seen from the other side.

November 17: Ms. Lucy B. Wayne and Martin Dickinson, archaeologists, will give LAHS members the benefit of their experiences in Darien (1984-85) exploring the path of the sewer system. This team will be conducting the archaeological preservation and interpretation for the Darien waterfront development.

December 16: Malcolm Bell, Jr. will supply a program on Fanny Kemble Butler, in connection with an exhibition planned for the Library in January.

January 19, 1989: Dr. Sue Mullins Moore, anthropologist at Georgia Southern College, who will speak on what archaeological studies can tell of the people on the Butler estate at Hampton Point, St. Simons Island, as background for the exhibition on Fanny Kemble Butler at the Library.