

LAHS NEWS

DECEMBER, 1991

Lower Altamaha Historical Society Inc
PO. Box 1405 Darien .Georgia 31305.

VOL. 1, No. 3

Meetings are held at the historic Courthouse on the third Thursday of each month at 7:30 pm.
The Society extends a hearty welcome to all.

Current Calendar

Wednesday, December 11th, 1991.

From 9am until noon all are invited to participate in the greening of the Fort. Please bring greens, berryed boughs, and smilax vines to decorate the interior. Please call Ken Aims at 437-4770 and bring wire, scissors, string and staplers, if you have them available.

December 19th, 1991, at 6:30 pm. Christmas Party

Attend the LAHS Christmas Party at Fort King George sponsored by LAHS members and the staff of Fort King George! Please bring goodies to help cater for our guests. Members of the public are cordially invited.

Regular Program

Talks:

January 16th, 1992, at 7:30 pm.

The Archaeology of Darien's Waterfront? by Mr. Fred Cook

February 20th, 1992.

"The History of Old Ebenezer" by Mr. Sydney Waldhour, Past President, The Salzberger Society.

March 19th, 1992.

"Fort Morris and Midway" by Mr. Bill DeLoach.

April 16th, 1992.

"Making a Living on Sapelo After the War" and "Transportation by Waterway" by Mr. Buddy Sullivan.

Nominating Committee report.

May 21st, 1992. Annual Meeting of the Society.

Election of Officers.

North McIntosh County by Mrs. I.T.Mealing.

Field Trip

December 12th, 1991.

The William Bartram Exhibit at the Coastal Museum.

There will be carpool transportation leaving at 9 am. from the County Courthouse. Total cost: the price of admission. Call 437- 6985.

April 11th, 1992.

Trip to celebrate the Rice Festival at Sunbury, Midway and Woodmanston Plantation. Only charge: \$10. (set by the organizers.)

May 9th, 1992.

A Fishfry to celebrate the Rafthands 10th. Anniversary.

May 19-21st, 1992.

Stay overnight at 'the Bighouse' on Sapelo Island. The charge will be \$85.00 per person.

Available space is limited; after members have been accommodated their guests can be included, **USCG** Captain Suzanne Forsythe can provide a trip by small boat for \$10 extra. Mr. Buddy Sullivan, author of "Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater" will be joining the group for the Wednesday. Those wishing just to spend the day should call Carolyn Hodges at 437-6985 for information. (Charge \$10)

On mutually convenient dates:

Tours of the Altamaha River, courtesy of LAHS President, Carolyn Hodges call 437-6985.

CORRECTION TO THE CEMETERY COMMITTEE REPORT (Newsletter June 1991 Vol. 1 No 2)

Committee Chairperson Manic Gladstone has requested that the last portion of the report be corrected to read as follows: . . .(members) found the final resting place at the Old City Cemetery of the two swift Indian women and a baby (Circa 200 to 600 A.O.D.) which had been found during the Archaeological survey for the sewer system along Cathead Creek.

Books for Christmas

Members are urged to consider as Christmas presents the books now on sale that have been written by members of the Society. 'Fort King George - Step One to Statehood' by Jeannine Cook and 'Early days on the Georgia Tidewater' can both be obtained from the office of the Darien News, Darien, Georgia 31305.

At our November 21st, 1991 meeting Mr. Buddy Sullivan was honored by the Society for his authorship of the book Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater and its later second edition. Society President Carolyn Hodges presented to Mr. Sullivan a framed document in testimony to the distinction that his labors have brought to the Society.

There follows a short commentary by the Author.

Where It Came From and How It Came To Be: An Informal Overview

By BUDDY SULLIVAN

I learned at an early age that McIntosh County was indeed a special sort of place historically. Early historic awareness was nurtured by adolescent explorations of the county's creeks and marsh hammocks in a 12-foot wooden bateau. Even at the age of 12, the historic significance of all those deposits of ballast-stone and the rotting timbers of long-unused wharves scattered along the McIntosh tidewater did not escape me. I knew even then that these were things worthy of serious historical investigation.

Bessie Lewis was the county historian then, and everyone always assumed that, someday, it would be she who would produce the "definitive?" history of the county.

"Miss Bessie", as those who knew her were fond of calling her, would occasionally invite me along on her historical junkets about the area, always in search of a lead or information about something or someone. The times spent with Miss Bessie had a lasting, and most positive, effect on me.

Years later, after I had come home to roost as editor of the Darien News, and after the death of Bessie Lewis, McIntosh County still did not have its much-needed definitive history. Miss Bessie had compiled *They Called Their Town Darien* a few years before her death. Unfortunately, funding was available for only a sixty-page booklet, thus this little overview of McIntosh County's history provided only a superficial glimpse at best of this most historic of counties of coastal Georgia. In 1985, it seemed apparent that no one was going to do the county history. It needed to be done, obviously--here was one of the most historic counties in the state, and yet no substantive book of history at all. Maybe I could write the book. But, could I do the job the way it needed doing? I wasn't sure.

The passage of time had not dampened my childhood enthusiasm for local history. I soon realized there was a serious dearth of knowledge regarding the last 200 years or so of McIntosh County history, and that there were numerous primary sources waiting to be tapped. Were the events and personalities of the 19th and 20th centuries to be ignored forever? What about McIntosh County's incredibly interesting waterway and maritime heritage which had heretofore been all but ignored by past researchers? What about the steamboats, the railroads, the commercial fishery, the eras of saw milling, the plantations, ad infinitum? As important as the 18th century was, McIntosh County's past (as I discovered more and more in my research) embodied a good deal more than Scottish tartans and broadswords and tiresome legends about the old Oglethorpe oak.

The broad tapestry of local history unfolded in hours of research in such archival repositories as Savannah's Hodgson Hall (Georgia Historical Society), the Georgia Archives in Atlanta, the National Archives in Washington, and libraries from Athens to Sea Island to Sapelo. I immersed myself in the dusty deedbooks of the county courthouse, studied old journals and diaries, viewed countless reels of microfilm documenting everything from census and agricultural records, to slave schedules and plantation account books. Here was the stuff from which a real county history could be forged.

It all slowly came together--a thousand assorted nuggets of information covering subjects ranging from Wahoo Island to Rifle Cut, from Bulltown Swamp to the Teakettle Dividings..little-known facts, new perspectives on old stories, fresh insights on theories once

held as supposedly “unchallengeable”...all of it demanding organization, cohesion and proper presentation.

The waterway heritage would plainly make a good foundation around which to develop the story of the tidewater rice, Sea Island cotton and sugar plantations of the antebellum days; my delightful discovery of Archibald McKinley’s Sapelo Island Journal in the summer of 1987 placed that island’s postbellum history in perspective and I quickly attached paramount importance (and properly so, I think) to that intensely interesting period within the overall framework of my story; Thomas Spalding and Howard Coffin, my Sapelo heroes”, would naturally receive close scrutiny in the book; the days of sawmills and timber rafting, the ‘ghost towns’ of western McIntosh, the commercial fishery--all these topics merited serious attention.

The book came together, through first one draft, then another and, finally, a third. In order to establish credibility for the volume (and myself) the book would obviously have to be heavily footnoted. I had discovered that far too many county histories had been allowed to be published totally devoid of documentation which, to me, is unforgivable, (i.e., if you can’t substantiate it, don’t write it!) Then too, there were all the untruths, distortions and outright fabrications about the history of McIntosh County which had been given credence in previous books and studies about coastal Georgia which cried out for correction. It was time to set the record straight--at least as best as I could--and I intended to do that as accurately and dispassionately as possible. Footnotes scare away some readers. But then, perhaps, those are the ones who are not really concerned with the truth.

Thus did *Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater* entail better than 2,000 footnotes in the form of source citations and notes of explanation, in addition to the copious use of many primary sources, some of which had never been utilized by researchers of local history before.

I am not a professional historian. I am not the county historian; I am, rather, a historian of the county. I am not a Ph.D. I have published no articles in scholarly journals, nor are my manuscripts in demand from academic presses. What I have, however, is an abiding, even urgent, love for, and interest in, the history of McIntosh County and Sapelo Island. Being a native of the county who also happens to be ‘possessed’ (or, obsessed!) by the county’s history gives me a solid leg up on the “outsider” just arriving from academia “cold” to the ways, whys and wherefores of our heritage. I have an unabashed and confident ‘feel’ and instinct about the history of old McIntosh that I think is absolutely necessary in order to project the realism that a book of this sort needs in order to be both studious and serious, yet entertaining and readable too. An outside historian, no matter the extent of their credentials, would be lacking this vital ingredient of having the “feel” of a locale’s heritage. It is important to have that in assembling a volume of local history. Jayne M. King of Vero Beach, Fla. wrote: “*Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater* is just great in every aspect...You can almost feel, smell and touch the history of McIntosh County through its pages. It is quite a feat to make history come alive, but the author has succeeded.” That compliment, more than any other, has made me feel the best about *Early Days*. Based on my lack of scholarly credentials, there were some who took to task my qualifications to write the history of McIntosh County and Sapelo. All fine and well. The historian, or writer, who cannot stand up under scrutiny and thinks they are above reproach is in the wrong game at the wrong time and is sadly deluding himself.

While the doubting Thomases have not been totally silenced, I can nonetheless say with no little satisfaction that *Early Days* has been a success far exceeding my wildest expectations. The first edition of 1,000 books was a sellout within three months. A second edition, with forty pages of new material, is now on the market and is doing well in Savannah and other coastal book outlets.

Historians far more capable than I, ranging from Malcolm Bell and Virginia Wood, to Kenneth Thomas and Mary Dullard, have been generous in their praise for the content, style, writing and research contained in *Early Days*. I am both gratified and humbled to be treated with this kind of outside recognition from no less authorities as these. To have your work labeled by these professionals as “definitive” and “a major contribution to the literature of the coast” is a most pleasing sensation.

It makes it all worth it. I am glad I persevered with *Early Days*. There were times when I had to lay the project aside. I was thoroughly intimidated by every one of the 824 pages contained in *Early Days*. But such are the hazards of a task of this sort. I would gladly do it all over again, to continue to document the history of the coast in my own small way. And I will. Eventually. For such is my love and appreciation for the history of ‘old McIntosh’ and the Georgia tidewater.