

# The Altamaha Echoes

Lower Altamaha Historical Society Newsletter June 2001

## Darien Walking Tour –Saturday, June 9,2001 –10A.M.

A walking tour of the Darien waterfront and historic district will be sponsored by LAHS on Saturday, June 9<sup>th</sup>. Conducting the tour will be McIntosh County historian Buddy Sullivan. The tour will begin at 10 am, at the Welcome Center on Broad Street and will take about two hours, ending with a Dutch treat lunch at the Magnolia Tea Room. Sullivan frequently conducts Darien walking tours in which the colonial, antebellum, Civil War and postbellum history of the town is featured, as well as architectural highlights of public and private buildings, parks and streetscapes.

## LOWER ALTAMAHA HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2001—2002

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## Lower Altamaha Historical Society — May 1,2001 — April 30, 2002

**Annual Dues: Individual \$10; Family \$ 15; Lifetime \$250; Corporate \$100**

Please remit your dues for 2001-02: LAHS, P.O. Box 1405, Darien, Georgia 31305

## LAHS MEETING, JUNE 21, 2001, 7:00 P.M. -St. ANDREW's PARISH HOUSE

HOSPITALITY: Betty & John Cleveland, Linda & Richard Hawks

DUTCH TREAT SUPPER, 5:45 PM., at B & J PIZZA

“Mary, Queen of Scot?” will be the program presented by Charles H. Haws, BA., Ph.D.. Dr. Haws is an excellent teacher, established scholar, and good administrator. He was awarded the degree of Ph.D. at the University of Glasgow for his dissertation on “Scottish Parish Clergy at the Reformation” He created and built the “institute of Scottish Studies” at Old Dominion University. Norfolk, Virginia. Dr. Haws, a complete academician has been published with books and numerous articles. He edited international journals and created Educational Travel Programs to Europe with his students.

Dr. Charles Haws lives in Savannah and teaches History at Armstrong Atlantic State University.

**LAHS MEETING, JULY 18, 2001, 7:00 P.M.**

FORT KING GEORGE HISTORIC SITE  
POT LUCK PICNIC SUPPER, 7:00 P.M.

HOSPITALITY: Ward & Chris Milner, Carol Case

Fellowship Picnic Supper for LAHS members and guest. Bring a dish that will serve about eight people that does not require a knife for eating. There are not enough picnic tables for all of us. LABS will furnish sweet and unsweet tea and all of the paper products. Fellowship and socializing will be the fare for the evening, There is no program planned.

**LAHS Board of Directors Meeting, August 16, 2001— 4:30 p.m. — St. Andrew's Parish House**

**LAHS MEETING, AUGUST 16, 2001, 7:00 PM. ST. ANDREW'S PARISH HOUSE**

HOSPITALITY: Lou Nell Gibson, Jamie & Bob Dickey

DUTCH TREAT SUPPER, 5:45 P.M. at B & J PIZZA

"*Will They Fight*" A look at African American soldiers during the Civil War will be the program, presented by Patrick Shell. This will be History come to life as Patrick will portray a soldier joining the United States Colored Troops [USCT] and then step out of character to answer questions. The USCT were created during the War Between The States.

Patrick Shell is Chief Ranger at the Fort Frederica National Monument on St. Simons Island.

**Buddy Sullivan Receives Hawes Book Award**

LAHS Board member and past president Buddy Sullivan was recently awarded the Lila M, Hawes Award by the Georgia Historical Society for his having authored what was judged to be the best book about local history in Georgia during the year 2000. The Hawes Award was presented this year in recognition of Sullivan's recent volume, *From Beautiful Zion to Bird Creek, A History of Bryan County, Georgia*. A GHS reviewing committee selects the annual award. It was presented to Sullivan in April at the GHS' Annual Meeting. He received a certificate and \$500 cash prize.

**TEXT OF HISTORIC MARKER sponsored by LAHS.**

The Georgia Historical Society approved the marker on April 6th and it has gone into production. It will be ready later this year and will be erected on the ground of the Darien City Hall. LAHS will sponsor a public unveiling ceremony. This is the second state marker LABS has sponsored in the last 18 months, The other was the Columbus Square Railroad Depot. Following is the text of the new marker:

**The Burning of Darien**

On June II, 1863 the seaport of Darien was vandalized and burned by Federal forces stationed on nearby St. Simons Island. The town was largely deserted, most of its 500 residents having sought refuge inland. Lost were public buildings, businesses, churches and most private residences. Conducting the raid were units comprised of among the first African-American troops to serve the Union cause, the 54th Massachusetts Volunteers under Col. Robert U. Shaw, and the 2nd South Carolina Volunteers under Col. James Montgomery. The burning of Darien, undefended and of little strategic importance, was one of the most controversial events of the Civil War.

**Living on the Georgia Tidewater** - The burning of Darien in 1863 is told in detail in many books. Below are excerpts from *THEY CALLED THEIR TOWN DARIEN* by Bessie Lewis and

*DARIEN, The Death and Rebirth of a Southern Town* by Spencer B. King, Jr.

Came the 11th of June, 1863 – Darien lay still in the summer sun. No human being walked the oak-shaded streets. The few women, children and very old men who lived in the town had fled to The Ridge a few days before, There was an unearthly quiet in the town, the quiet of empty houses, of silence where there should be voices. The great mills at Lower Bluff and at Cat Head were still, the wharves were deserted, churches, schools and all business houses were closed.

Some time before noon, Captain John Lane, commanding a twenty-man detachment of cavalry which patrolled the coast and was the county’s only protection, sighted a gunboat and two steamers entering Doboy Sound. He watched them from a thicket near The Ridge. The vessels moved rapidly, headed south until they reached the Altamaha and turned toward Darien.

The fleet was under the command of Col. S. C. Montgomery the Kansas Jayhawker, who brigade was stationed on St. Simons. Early that morning they had embarked “to present his compliments to the rebels of Georgia.”

His force comprised five companies of the Second South Carolina, eight companies of the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts, Colonel Shaw, all Negro except the officers, and the Third Rhode Island battery, Captain Brayton. The gunboat John Adams, Captain Smith, and the transports Sentinel and Harriet Weed constituted the fleet.

As they steamed up the river, the John Adams threw a constant stream of shot and shell into the woods, along the shore and into the town as they came abreast of it. The Sentinel and the Harriet A. Weed eased up to the wharf Colonel Montgomery gave the order to disembark and form a line of battle in the public square. Pickets were sent out to the edge of town, and the command was given to search it, take to the boats everything of value, then fire it, Colonel Shaw strongly objected to these orders, but to have refused to obey would have rendered him liable to court martial. In a matter of minutes every house was broken into. Fire had already begun – started by a shell thrown before the troops landed – and a high wind drove the flames down Broad Street.

An officer of the 54th Massachusetts later wrote of the scene: ‘Soon the men began to come in ... loaded with all sorts of furniture, stores, trinkets, etc. . . We had sofas, tables, pianos, chairs, minors, carpets, beds, bedsteads, carpenters’ tools, coopers’ tools, books, law-books, account books in unlimited supply...’ An immense pile of lumber that lay on the wharf was loaded on the boats. Drovers of sheep and cows were driven in and put on board. Others were shot in the streets.

The stores along the river front were fired last, then the troops hurried on board the ships – not a minute too soon, as the town was a sheet of flame, and heat at the water front was so bad the soldiers had to stay on the opposite sides of the ships. The rosin took fire, and as night came up a terrible thunder storm added to the fury of the blaze, the town was an inferno.

A traveler passing through later that summer wrote to a friend, “Darien is now one plain of ashes and blackened chimneys.”

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On the day after the burning of Darien Robert Shaw wrote to his mother telling her about the expedition which ended in the destruction of the undefended little town. The letter expressed not only his abhorrence of the deed but also his denial of responsibility for it. But even as he condemned his fellow officer, one senses as he reads between the lines, a bothered conscience, The letter was more than a protest expressed in the privacy of correspondence with his mother, it was a confession of his inner thoughts.. Deep within himself he shared the shame of it. However, he did not go so far as to take on himself any blame for obeying orders of Colonel Montgomery who, in turn, was under General Hunter’s orders, Nevertheless, his humanitarian spirit which had shown so much concern for enslaved black men now rebelled against the inhumane treatment to which their masters were subjected.

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Five Years after the war ended and seven years after her son's death, Sarah Shaw sat one day in her North Shore home near the boat landing at Sailor's Snug Harbor in the town of New Brighton on Staten Island. She was reading the *New York World* in it was a plea for financial assistance to help the people of St. Andrew's parish at Darien to restore their house of worship. It was signed by the Reverend Robert F. Clute, and his senior warden, William Robert Gignilliat. Sarah had followed intensely through her son's letters the events of that June day seven years before when the church had gone up in flames in the destruction of Darien. And after Robert died at Fort Wagner she had kept and treasured his letters. They were tangible bits to give more substance to memory.

As she scanned the *World*, suddenly a sentence stood out vividly upon the page: "On June 11, 1863, without an engagement, the town of Darien, Georgia, was taken and burned by the United States Colored Troops, Colonel Shaw, Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment, commanding."

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Mrs. Shaw went hastily to her desk to write the editor of *Harper's Weekly* asking him to aid her in correcting what she knew to be a grievous error.

Setting the record straight in *Harper's Weekly* was one thing, but Sarah could not be satisfied until she had won the Darien people over to her side and proved to them that Robert should not be condemned

Thanks to Mrs. Shaw's efforts, a total of fourteen hundred dollars was received in response to St. Andrew's call for help. The Reverend Clute and his forty-four parishioners went to work immediately to build a modest little chapel on the Ridge. The building was completed and ready for consecration by May 1871. When first built it was a plain, square room, and the windows were of plain glass. Later, a porch was added, stained-glass windows put in, and the east end of the building made semicircular to provide for an enlarged chancel ----- Within a year after the chapel on the Ridge was consecrated the congregation of St. Andrew's began to make plans for a new sanctuary in Darien.