

# Altamaha Echoes

Lower Altamaha Historical Society Newsletter

April 2007

LAHS MEETING, April 19, 2007, 7:00 p.m. – Fort King George Historic Site  
Dutch treat supper, 5:45 p.m. at B&J Pizza

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***“The Special Interrelationship of Georgia's Coastal Environment and the Evolution of Its History and Culture”*** will be the program presented by Laura and Meredith Devendorf, noted coastal conservationists and recipients of the National Arbor Day Foundation's Good Stewardship Award. After an overview of coastal environmental history, Laura will focus on the role of the live oak in Georgia and the world. Together, mother and daughter manage land granted to their Puritan antecedents in 1755 and are passionate stewards and advocates of the natural and human history of the Georgia coast.

Meredith earned an honors degree in history from Amherst College and a Masters in Southern Studies from the University of Mississippi where she was a University Scholar and a graduate fellow at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture; she is currently working toward her Masters of Environmental Management at Duke University. Laura attended the University of Wisconsin where she was selected for the elite Integrated Liberal Studies honors program, and she returned to her native coastal Georgia after a successful career in the arts in San Francisco. Georgia's Tree Farmer of the Year in 2000, Laura opened Melon Bluff Nature and Heritage Reserve with her late husband Don and daughter Meredith. She also founded Seabrook Village, the nation's first African-American living history museum devoted to post-Civil War freeholders.

**LAHS Board of Directors meeting, May 19, 2007, 4:30 p.m.**

Fort King George Historical Site  
LAHS members are always welcome

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LAHS meeting, May 19, 2007, 7:00 p.m.  
Fort King George Historical Site  
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***“A Look at the Life of the Common Soldier of the American War for Independence”*** will be presented by Robert K. Weber, Special Collections Librarian at the Georgia Historic Society, and will include a brief outline of Georgia's military history during the war. Robert's portrayal as an 18<sup>th</sup> century re-enactor is of a militiamen, thus his clothing is civilian and his equipment is a mix of military and civilian items. He will have a “show and tell” of items a militiaman would carry and how they are used.

The election of 4 members to the Board of Directors of LAHS will be held at the April 19, 2007 meeting. Those elected will take office in May for a term of two years. Proposed slate is Jim Bruce, Mary Evelyn Hoffhaus, David Miller, and Chris Milner, as submitted by the Nominating committee: Jack Godfrey, chairman, Kaye Traer, and Lamar Williamson. Nominations from the floor will be accepted for any LAHS member that has given their consent for the nomination.

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## **COMING EVENTS:**

- A field trip has been planned for April 23, 2007 for a walking tour of Civil War sites in Savannah and lunch at The Lady & Sons restaurant. Cost for the tour is \$10.00; lunch cost is \$19.23, which includes beverage, gratuity and tax. There will be an additional charge for bus transportation with a late morning departure anticipated. Please let Jean Hawkins (832-6588) know by the April 19 meeting if you wish to participate.
- Our summer picnic will be held on Thursday, June 21, 2007 at 5:30 p.m. at Fort King George. *Please note that this is a change from previous years.* Please make plans to attend and bring a dish to share. LAHS provides drinks and the meat. Come and enjoy great fellowship!

***REMINDER: Membership dues are due January 1 of each year:***

Life \$250.00 - Corporate \$100.00 annual - Libraries \$25.00 - Family \$20.00  
Individual \$15.00 - Student \$5.00.

*If you haven't already done so, please send your check to LAHS, P.O. Box 1405, Darien, GA 31305 or give to Jeanne Klippel, Membership Chairman, at the April meeting. LAHS values your support.*

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**Confederate Memorial Day, April 26, 2007**  
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(Georgia Historical Marker, located on Ga. 99 one mile east of U.S. 17 near Fort King George) - ***“Birthplace of John McIntosh Kell.*** Laurel Grove, at the end of this avenue, was the birthplace of John McIntosh Kell, 1823-1900, distinguished Naval officer. He was a member of the expedition of Commodore Matthew C. Perry to Japan in 1853, and was Master of the flagship *Mississippi* on the homeward cruise. When Georgia seceded from the Union, John McIntosh Kell resigned his commission to join the Confederacy. He was Executive Officer of the *Sumter*, then of the *Alabama* throughout her brilliant career on the seas, and in her final battle with the *Kearsarge* off Cherbourg. Later in life, John McIntosh Kell served for several years as Adjutant General of the State of Georgia.”

**Living on the Georgia Tidewater** - John McIntosh Kell (1823-1900) was McIntosh County's most celebrated participant in the Civil War, and one of the most distinguished officers of the Confederate Navy. Below are excerpts from *Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater* by Buddy Sullivan.

Born January 23, 1823 at Laurel Grove plantation near Darien, Kell was a descendant of the founding Scottish Highlanders, being the son of John and Margery Spalding Baillie Kell. John McIntosh Kell's closest friend was his cousin, Randolph Spalding.

In 1841, Kell received an appointment as a midshipman in the United States Navy and, by 1855, had advanced to the rank of lieutenant. His 20-year career in the U.S. Navy was one of distinction, highlighted by his participation in Commodore Matthew C. Perry's expedition which opened Japan to American trade in 1835 and the Paraguay expedition of 1858. On Perry's voyage to the Far East, Kell served as Master of the steam flagship *Mississippi*. In 1856, John McIntosh Kell married Julia Blanche Munroe. He returned with his bride to McIntosh County that year and was entertained by Randolph Spalding at South End House on Sapelo Island.

Kell resigned from the United States service on the day Georgia seceded from the Union in January 1861. He served briefly in the tiny Georgia navy under Commodore Josiah Tatnall at Savannah until April 1861, after which he received orders to report to Commander Raphael Semmes, CSN, at New Orleans. Kell biographer Norman C. Delaney notes that Semmes "personally selected Kell to be his Executive Officer aboard the *Sumter*," one of the first Southern commerce raiders.

*Sumter* was decommissioned in 1862 after which Kell joined Semmes, again as second-in-command, of the new Confederate raider *Alabama* which had been secretly built and fitted out at Liverpool, England. Kell provided outstanding service aboard *Alabama*, and Semmes and other Confederate officers praised Kell for his efficiency in managing the ship and its crew of mostly English sailors.

After the *Alabama* sank USS *Hatteras* in a gun-duel off Galveston, Kell was promoted to Commander. *Alabama* went on to become by far the most successful of all Confederate commerce raiders, accounting for sixty-five Union vessels captured or sunk in less than two years.

His ship worn and in need of repair, and his crew tired and battle-weary from the constant attrition of time spent on the high seas, Semmes brought his ship into the French port of Cherbourg on the English Channel where the U.S. steam sloop *Kearsarge* finally caught up with him.

Although the two ships were almost evenly-matched, *Alabama* with eight guns to *Kearsarge's* seven, the Yankee vessel had the heavier armament, including two 11-inchers. In addition, *Kearsarge's* guns would be better served: she was a fresh ship with a crew at peak efficiency. Semmes would have been wise to seek accommodation with the French as long as possible and remain in port at Cherbourg. Nonetheless, he accepted the challenge of Winslow of the *Kearsarge*, and steamed to the outer harbor to do battle.

For just over an hour the two wooden steam warships maneuvered in concentric circles about 900 yards apart, firing broadsides at each other. The marksmanship of the *Kearsarge*, as expected, proved to be the most effective, and the Northern vessel began landing shots with telling effect on *Alabama*. The Confederate raider, holed several times below the waterline, sank, and Kell, Semmes and other survivors were plucked out of the water by a nearby English yacht and transported to England - much to the disappointment of Winslow who was hoping to capture Semmes and Kell and take them to the United States to stand trial for what many Northerners were convinced was piracy on the high seas.

After the war, Kell retired to a life of farming at his Sunnyside, Georgia home in Spalding County near Griffin. In 1886, he was appointed Adjutant-General of Georgia by Governor John B. Gordon, an event which focused new attention on Kell as a Confederate naval hero.

In his memoirs, published just before his death in 1900, Kell described the satisfaction of a man who has reached the end of a productive and fulfilling life: "I have reached three score years and ten (the allotted life of man). My life has been long, happy and eventful. Of course it has been checked with the grief and sorrows that fall to the lot of all, but nearing the sunset of my days, beyond which are the 'hills of light,' I can look backward into the past of holy memories without regret, and hopefully into the future, my lifeboat gliding on, no anchor dragging, Christ's love at the helm, and God aloft."

**LOWER ALTAMAHA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

P.O. Box 1405 – Darien, GA 31305

[www.loweraltamahistoricalociety.org](http://www.loweraltamahahistoricalociety.org)

LAHS Officers 2006-2008

President	Harriet Roberson	912-265-6729
Vice-President	Jack Godfrey	912-832-5622
Secretary	Elizabeth A. Ewing	912-832-5089
Treasurer	Kaye Traer	912-832-5150

2006-2008

Harry Clark  
Howard Klippel  
Myrtle Newberry  
Lamar Williamson

2005-2007

Jim Bruce  
Bob Durden  
Dave Miller  
Chris Milner

Past-President Peyton Lingle  
Director Emeritus Buddy Sullivan

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**LOWER ALTAMAHA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**Life Memberships:**

Muriel Bell	Darien Telephone Co.
Mrs. Caroline B. Davis	Gus & Marg Hallam
Alfred W. Jones	Chris & Ward Milner
John Reehling	Enterprise Rent-A-Car
Laura Berolzheimer	Jeff & Kelly Spratt
Lloyd Flanders	David Miller
Bill & Sherry Minnich	

**Corporate Memberships:**

Sapelo National Bank, William Parker, President  
The Book Shop, Inc., Harold & Virginia Hicks  
Coastal Georgia Historical Society  
“The Lodge,” Little St. Simons Island

**FORT KING GEORGE STATE HISTORICAL SITE**

P.O. Box 711 – Darien, GA 31305 ---- 912-437-4770

[www.gastateparks.org/fortkinggeorge](http://www.gastateparks.org/fortkinggeorge)

**Living History Programs** for students and guests are a daily activity at the Fort. Reenactors allow an eighteenth century experience for the observer.

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**GARRISON WEEKEND**

Saturday, April 21, 2007

12:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Join the Garrison for a workshop devoted toward nautical skills on the colonial coast.

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**GARRISON WEEKEND**

Saturday, May 26, 2007

12:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Join the Garrison for a day of artillery drills, musket firings, and soldiers' life activities in commemoration of Memorial Day.

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*Lower Altamaha Historical Society, Inc.*  
P. O. Box 1405  
Darien, Georgia 31305