

Sapelo Island Settlement and Land Ownership:

An Historical Overview, 1865-1970

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Human activity on Sapelo Island, Georgia, has evolved for more than 5,000 years through a succession of peoples, from Native Americans, Spanish missionaries, colonial traders and farmers, antebellum agriculturists, African-American slaves and freedmen, and twentieth century American industrialists and financial tycoons. As will be argued in this paper, clearly defined patterns of settlement and land ownership on Sapelo following the Civil War developed in response to successive cycles of economic and cultural adaptation. Concomitant with their localized subsistence agriculture, and their religious, social and family-centric activities, Sapelo Island's extensive saltwater Geechee population realized a distinct and gradual pattern of community in virtually every section of the 16,500-acre barrier island.¹ As time went along, there developed pursuits of livelihood additional to farming for Sapelo's Geechee population. In the postbellum period and early twentieth century, timber cutting and timber loading, cattle-raising and seafood harvesting supplemented (but did not supplant) agricultural endeavor.

Until the Reconstruction period after the Civil War land ownership on Sapelo Island was associated with only two or three families. From ca. 1870, land ownership, and the island's subsequent settlement patterns, was predicated upon the gradual acquisition of land through purchase by the freedmen of the former antebellum Sapelo plantations.

For the ensuing one hundred years and more, the island's population was comprised largely of African-American freedmen and their descendants, and fluctuated through the period between an average of 250 residents to a high of over 500 in the early 20th century. Many were engaged in

subsistence agriculture, and commercial fishing and lumbering, and resided in several distinct settlements on the island: The largest of these were Raccoon Bluff and Belle Marsh on the North End, Lumber Landing in the central uplands, and Hog Hammock and Shell Hammock on the South End.

From the last three decades of the 19th century through the first three decades of the 20th there evolved a patchwork of settlements all over Sapelo Island. At one time or another there were at least 15 distinct Geechee communities on the island, some with as few as one or two families. In addition to the five noted above, there were established at varying times during the period covered by this study, communities at Behavior/Bush Camp Field, Riverside, Bourbon, Drink Water, Hanging Bull, Jack's Hammock, Mary's Hammock, Moses Hammock, King Savannah, and Chocolate.² What follows is an overview of these settlement patterns, based upon a synthesis and consolidation of existing primary and secondary source materials.

Population Analysis

According to the McIntosh County, Georgia, Population Census of 1860 (Slave Schedules), there were 370 slaves on Sapelo Island living in 50 dwellings just prior to the Civil War. This total included the 252 slaves of the Spalding plantations on the South and North ends of the island (Long Tabby, Chocolate and Bourbon), and 118 slaves at Kenan Place.³

In August 1865, in the immediate aftermath of the war and the emancipation of the slaves, federal authorities counted 352 freedmen that had resettled on Sapelo.⁴ These included



those who had remained on the island during the war when the island had been evacuated by the Spaldings, and those who had returned to Sapelo from Baldwin County, Georgia, where they had been removed by island plantation owners Randolph Spalding and his brother-in-law Michael J. Kenan. William S. McFeely, in his poignant and moving study, *Sapelo's People*, relates the arduous and trying 200-mile trek made by many of the former Sapelo slaves back to their homes on Sapelo Island, many by way of Savannah at the time of Sherman's march across Georgia from Atlanta to the sea.

The 352 Sapelo freedmen in 1865 were distributed as follows: South End (owner Thomas Spalding II), 130 freedmen in 24 dwellings; Kenan Place (Michael J. Kenan), 100 freedmen; Chocolate and Bourbon (Randolph Spalding Estate), 122 freedmen. Before, during and immediately after the Civil War there were black settlements at:

South End—Including Shell Hammock, Bush Camp/Behavior, Hog Hammock, Drink Water and Riverside.

Kenan, or Middle Place—Hanging Bull and Kenan Field/Lumber Landing.

North End—Chocolate, Bourbon and later, Moses Hammock, Belle Marsh and Raccoon Bluff.

Population patterns on Sapelo Island during the postbellum period and early 20th century may be deduced from the following, as revealed from the Federal census and various other sources:

In 1873, church records indicate there were 141 members of the First African Baptist Church at Hanging Bull. In 1904, there were 196 members of the same church, by that time it having removed to Raccoon Bluff. Also in 1904, there were 74 congregants of the St. Luke's African Baptist Church at Hog Hammock. This would indicate a black population on Sapelo of something over 400 residents around the turn of the century and just prior to the acquisition of the island by Howard Coffin in 1912. The largest concentration of residents was at Raccoon Bluff.⁵

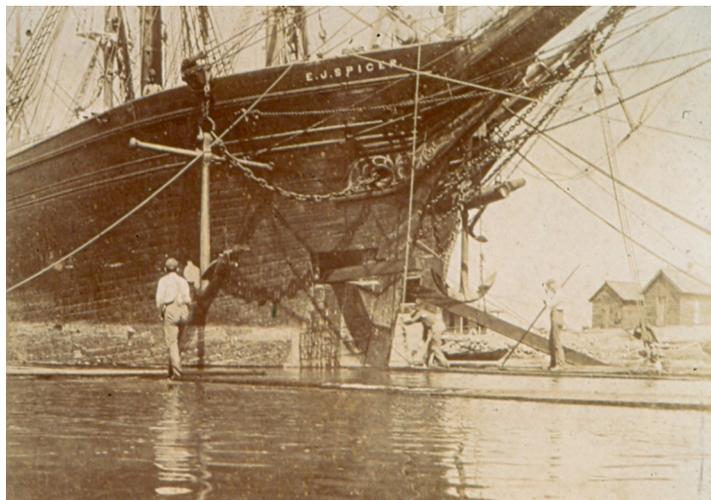
The 1910 Federal census listed 539 Geechee African-American residents on Sapelo, in 109 households, with 16 white residents in five households.⁶ This was apparently the peak of black population on Sapelo Island. There were 194 residents at Raccoon Bluff in 1910. At Hog Hammock there were 163 people with another 41 at Lumber Landing. The inflated African-American population on the island during the first decade of the twentieth century is almost certainly

attributable to the heavy lumber and timber shipping activity in Sapelo Sound. There were timber loading grounds at nearby Dog Hammock, Hazzards Island, Front River (Creighton Island) and Julianton River to accommodate a sizeable shipping trade, both domestic and international. Numerous local African-Americans were employed in this activity from 1865 to ca. 1915 as bar pilots, stevedores, sawmill operators and other tasks associated with this thriving trade that made Darien and McIntosh County the leading exporter of yellow pine timber on U.S. eastern seaboard in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁷

The 1920 federal census identified 294 black residents in 61 households on Sapelo Island, out of a total population on the island of 299.⁸ During the 1920s, according to the recollections of Alfred W. Jones, Sr., manager of his cousin Howard Coffin's Sapeloe Plantation, there were "several hundred" black residents living on privately-owned lands on Sapelo Island, almost all of whom were at the settlements at Raccoon Bluff, Hog Hammock, Shell Hammock, Lumber Landing and Belle Marsh.⁹

The 1930 census listed 345 African-American residents in 75 households, and 52 whites in 12 households, residing on Sapelo. Most of the black residents were divided between Raccoon Bluff and Hog Hammock but the 1930 census also listed 11 black households at Shell Hammock. The majority of the whites on Sapelo at this time were various employees of Howard Coffin. The Coffins completed the restoration of the Sapelo Main House in 1925, while the island's logging, seafood and agricultural operations developed by Coffin were at their peak, just prior to the Depression.¹⁰

In April 1934, the deeds were finalized by which Coffin, represented by his cousin, Alfred W. (Bill) Jones, Sr., sold Sapelo Island to Richard J. Reynolds, Jr. of Winston-Salem,



Timber ship loading in Sapelo Sound ca. 1900.



Sapelo family scene 1920s.

NC, *exclusive* of seven areas that Coffin did not own: Hog Hammock, Raccoon Bluff, Belle Marsh, Lumber Landing, Shell Hammock, Behavior Cemetery and the lighthouse.¹¹

In 1950, about 250 African-Americans lived on Sapelo, mostly at Raccoon Bluff and Hog Hammock.¹² In 1963, there were 211 African-Americans living on the island, almost exclusively by that time in Hog Hammock. Perhaps up to half this number was residents relocated from the island's largest settlement, Raccoon Bluff, through the various land swaps instigated by the then-private owner of Sapelo Island, R.J. Reynolds, Jr.¹³ By the mid-1970s, it is estimated there were about 150 Geechee residents on the island.¹⁴ By 1990, the population had declined to about 70 residents at Hog Hammock, a number that has fluctuated slightly up or down from that in the years since to the time of this writing (2012).

Sapelo Island Population Chart

| Year | Black Population | White Population |
|------|------------------|------------------|
| 1865 | 352 | 0 |
| 1900 | 425 (approx) | 15 (approx) |
| 1910 | 539 | 16 |
| 1920 | 294 | 5 |
| 1930 | 345 | 52 |
| 1950 | 250 (approx) | |
| 1963 | 211 | |
| 1970 | 175 (approx) | |

Sources: U.S. Census, Population Schedules, McIntosh County; Crook, et.al., *Sapelo Voices*.

Raccoon Bluff and the North End

Edward Swarbreck, with business and shipping interactions with Thomas Spalding of Sapelo and other coastal planters, owned and planted Sea Island cotton at Chocolate and areas south and east of Chocolate until ca. 1835. John Montalet, a French aristocrat and immigrant, followed by Francis Hopkins and his heirs, owned the High Point and Bourbon Field tracts in the first two decades of the 19th century.¹⁵ Charles Rogers of Liberty County eventually acquired almost 7,000 acres of the middle and upper portions of the island until the sale by Rogers of the entire tract to Thomas Spalding in 1843. There were working cotton plantations on the North End at Chocolate, Bourbon Field and Mackay's Old Fields (east of High Point) during the antebellum period. Slaves owned by Swarbreck and Rogers, later Spalding and his heirs, worked these tracts.¹⁶

Most of the North End was sold in 1866 by Mary Bass Spalding (daughter in law of Thomas Spalding and widow of Randolph Spalding) to John Griswold of New York City. Amos Sawyer of Massachusetts subsequently acquired the tract in 1881, after which it was owned by Howard E. Coffin of Grosse Pointe, Michigan, from 1912 to 1934. In the latter year, it was sold to Richard J. Reynolds, Jr. Finally, the tract was acquired by the State of Georgia in 1969 by purchase from the widow of Reynolds, Annemarie Schmidt Reynolds. Most of the tract was designated as the R.J. Reynolds Wildlife Management Area by the managing entity, the Georgia Wildlife Commission, later Department of Natural Resources.

Chocolate was acquired by Spalding in 1843. The tabby buildings there were built ca. 1815-1820. The plantation was managed by Spalding's youngest son, Randolph Spalding (1822-1862), until the start of the Civil War. John Griswold tried unsuccessfully to cultivate cotton on the North End after the war for a brief period.¹⁷

Beginning in 1870, separate smaller tracts of the North End were sold by their white owners to freed slaves of Sapelo. In 1885, North End owner Amos Sawyer of Northampton, Massachusetts sold to Caesar Sams 60 acres at Lumber Landing, on the southwest side of the North End on the Duplin River. Most of the Lumber Landing tract remained in this family until it was acquired by Reynolds in 1956. Also in 1885, Sawyer sold a 50-acre tract to Joseph Jones, whose descendants were the Walker family, on the west side of the island south of Chocolate. This became the Belle Marsh settlement. Another small tract was sold in 1885 by Sawyer to

James Green. This was on the east side of the island just north of Raccoon Bluff. It reverted back to Sawyer in 1890.¹⁸

Raccoon Bluff was a tract originally owned by Picot de Boisfeuillet in 1789 as part of the French Sapelo Company's holdings. He also owned High Point and Bourbon Field. Picot died in 1800 and the tract was eventually acquired from his estate by George Street (died 1831). The second husband of Street's wife was Anson Kimberly, a prominent Darien businessman and political rival of Thomas Spalding. Kimberly owned the tract until his death in 1836, after which it passed into the ownership of the heirs of George Street. For many years this section of the island was known as the Street Place. This was the only tract on Sapelo Island never owned by Thomas Spalding, the primary property owner on the island until his death in 1851.¹⁹

In 1871 the Street heirs sold just under one thousand acres at Raccoon Bluff to a partnership of freedmen called William Hillery and Company. The original intent of the investors in the company was to establish large-scale farming operations on the site, with convenient water access for the shipment of agricultural commodities provided by Blackbeard Creek, a tidal stream that, with salt marshes, separates Sapelo from adjacent Blackbeard Island. Hillery, a former Sapelo Island slave, formed the company with two other freedmen, John Grovner and Billaly Bell, with whom he bought the land jointly for the sum of \$2,000, with a \$500 down payment and a loan repayment arrangement for the balance.²⁰ The three original partners of the Hillery Company divided 666 acres of the tract



Traditional community scene 1920s.

into 20 lots of approximately 33 acres each, with the three investors retaining 111 acres each for themselves.²¹

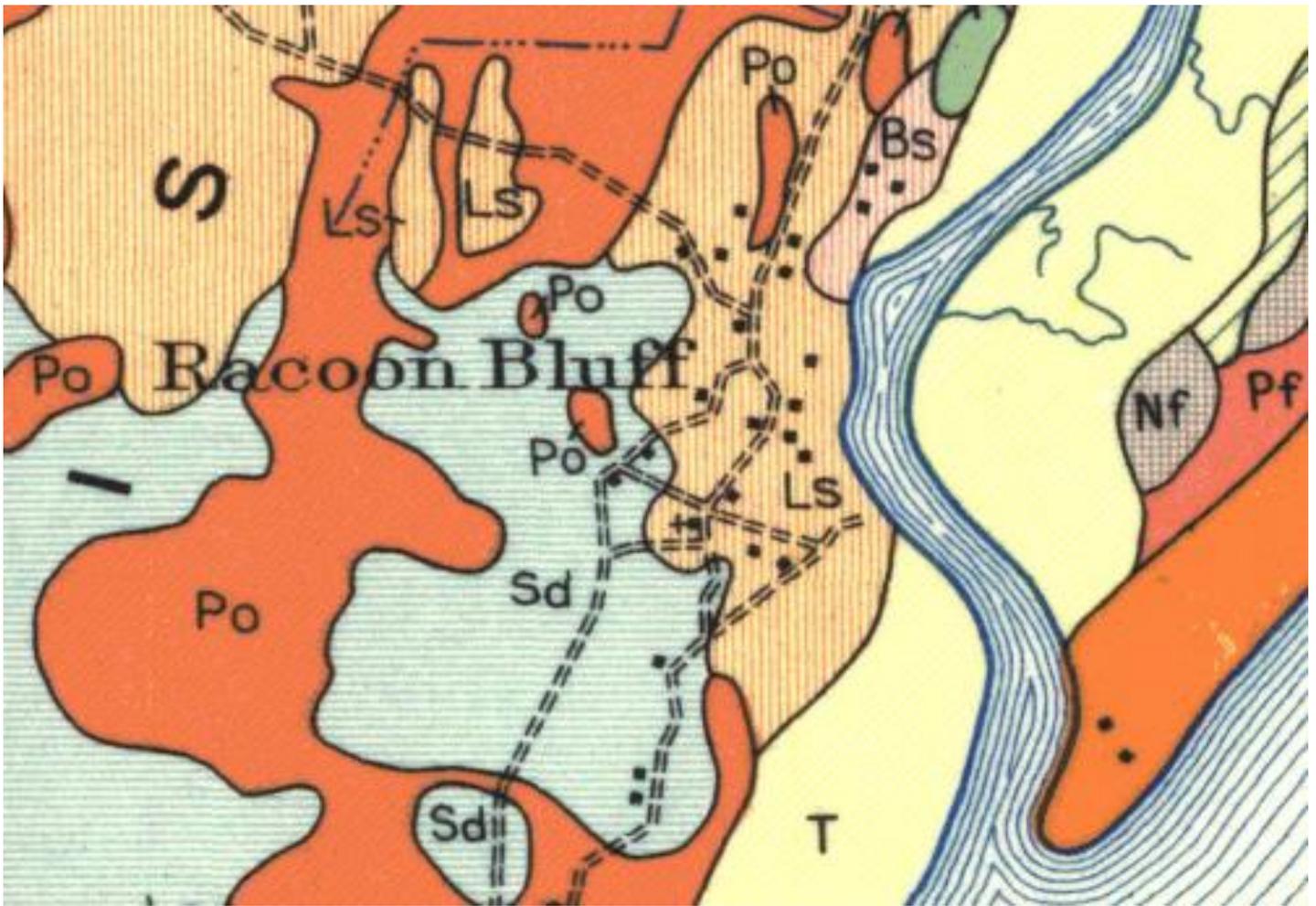
The Raccoon Bluff lots were all elongated and narrow, most leading from the interior near the road down to Blackbeard Creek.²² A settlement developed at Raccoon Bluff, becoming, at one time, the largest Geechee community on Sapelo Island. Some of the earliest settlers were Sampson Hogg and his family, who moved from Hog Hammock, along with Baileys, Walkers, Halls and Grovners and, soon after, the Bells, Spauldings, Greens and Lemons.²³

The 1880 federal census provides a good indication of the initial success of the Hillery Company's venture. Sixteen Sapelo freedmen owned property at Raccoon Bluff by that time, while another 22 were leasing, or renting, land for farming purposes.²⁴ The rental properties, in all likelihood, were based on payments which accrued toward the purchase of the property from the company. Historian William McFeely, in his systematic investigation of the surviving records, notes that he "could find no record of the long-term successful marketing of money crops [at Raccoon Bluff]...It was if Sapelo, having expelled the money-makers, wouldn't allow what the rest of America thought of as the right kind of entrepreneurship to take hold on its sacred sand...As her people somehow understand, you do with her only what she has to offer—her oysters, her trees for lumbering. And her demands for respect..."²⁵

By 1910 the primary island communities of Raccoon Bluff, Hog Hammock, Shell Hammock, Lumber Landing and Belle Marsh were well-established. The largest of these was at Raccoon Bluff where the federal census of that year enumerated 194 persons residing in 43 households. At Hog Hammock the 1910 census counted 163 persons in 33 homes, with 52 people in 12 households at Shell Hammock. At Lumber Landing were five households with three more at



Aerial view of Chocolate Plantation 1920s.



1929 McIntosh County Soil Map showing Raccoon Bluff tract. The black squares indicate approximate dwelling locations.

Belle Marsh (Walker and Jones families). There were single Geechee families residing at Chocolate and King Savannah.

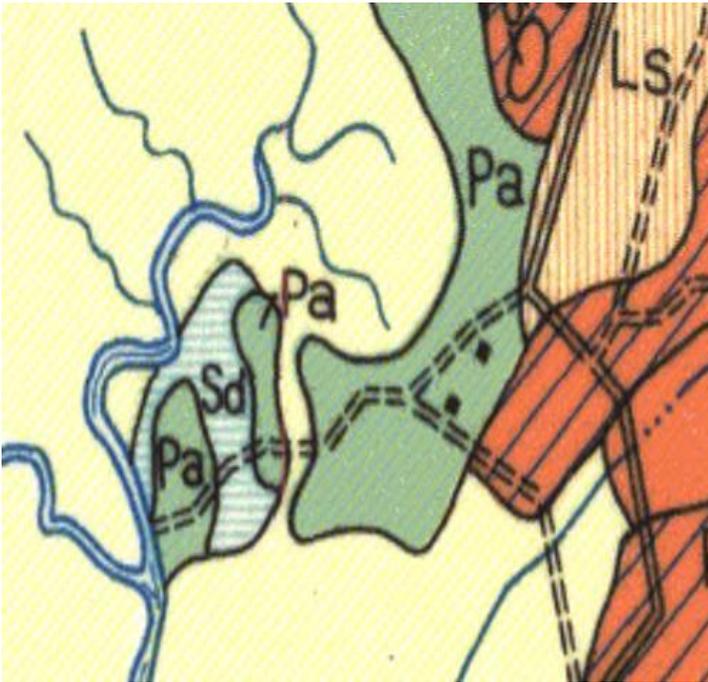
In the aggregate for 1910, Sapelo Island had an African-American population of 539 persons in 109 households, the peak population for the island. By 1930, the census indicates only two families at Belle Marsh—Nero and Nancy Jones and their son Freddie and daughter Anna, and Hicks and Hettie Walker and their son Gibb.²⁶

McIntosh County deed records indicate that Howard Coffin purchased several small lots at Raccoon Bluff in 1913 and 1914, shortly after he had purchased most of the island. This was possibly to facilitate his access to Blackbeard Island, the south end of which was across the marsh and creek from Raccoon Bluff. It is important to note in this context, however, that the Raccoon Bluff tract was not part of the acquisition by Coffin of most of Sapelo in 1912, or in his subsequent sale of the island to R.J. Reynolds, Jr. in 1934.

The 1929 Soil Survey of McIntosh County delineated 23 houses at Raccoon Bluff, among various other structures, including the F.A.B. Church, a general store and a school.²⁷

This is arguably the height of the Raccoon Bluff community, from a population and a development perspective. The dwellings were primarily one-story wood-frame residences, and there certainly is every likelihood that there were more houses than the 23 delineated on the Soil Survey map. The school was started as early as 1875, and in 1878 there were counted 108 school-age children on Sapelo Island.²⁸ In 1927 a new building for a Rosenwald school was constructed at Raccoon Bluff a short distance from the F.A.B. Church. It was later dismantled with only a portion of the brick chimney remaining at the site. The First African Baptist Church congregation built its wood-frame church at Raccoon Bluff in 1899-1900, shortly after the 1898 hurricane.²⁹ Restored and rededicated in 2000, the church edifice is the only structure remaining at Raccoon Bluff associated with the former black settlement. This sanctuary served as the place of worship for the First A.B. congregation until the new church was built at Hog Hammock in 1968.

The population figure of 194 given for Raccoon Bluff in the 1910 census likely represented a high for the community to that time. Meanwhile, the 1929 McIntosh County Soil Survey



Belle Marsh, soil map 1929.

map provides the clearest picture of Raccoon Bluff at the probable peak of its development. As noted earlier, 23 dwellings are delineated on the map, but obviously there were more. *Sapelo Voices* identifies (p. 33), the dwellings of many of Raccoon Bluff's residents at this time—from Alice Smith, James and Ida Green and James Green, Sr., east of the First A.B. Church near the bluff on Blackbeard Creek, to James and Hattie Spaulding, Charles Spaulding, James Bell and Sam Grovner to the north, Joe Walker, Moses Green, Shad Hall, and Dan and Rosa Parker just north and west of First A.B., the houses of Sam Roberts and Lucy Roberts southeast of the church near the marsh, and Gibb Lemons and Tom and Lula Lemons on the south end of Raccoon Bluff. *Sapelo Voices* states also that there were possibly some residents of the community not counted in the 1920 census.

Concomitantly, the 1929 soil map, while useful in establishing the general pattern and layout of structures in the community, probably indicates only a representation of the houses rather than an actual number. It is also possible that some of the census data in both 1920 and 1930 identified some families by heads of household or ownership of houses or property.

A contemporary picture of life and culture on Sapelo Island in the late 1930s is given in the Federal Writers Project volume, *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies among the Georgia Coastal Negroes*, published in 1940. A chapter in the compilation of oral histories in this volume is devoted to

Sapelo and includes interviews of island residents, some of whom lived at Raccoon Bluff. Persons interviewed were Katie Brown, Julia Grovner, Katie Grovner, George Smith, Phoebe Gilbert and Cuffy Wilson (both of Shell Hammock), Shad Hall of Hog Hammock and Nero Jones of Belle Marsh. One passage of *Drums and Shadows* is worth quoting as it places the island and its people in a cultural context only one or two generations removed from slavery:

“Small Negro settlements are scattered at the north end of Sapelo and are reached by winding roads cut through the tropical woodlands and brush. The Negroes are descendants of the slaves of the plantation era. Many lead an easy, carefree, life which consists chiefly of fishing, crabbing and cultivating a small patch of garden, while others engage in regular employment at the sawmill or in the company offices. Living an isolated island existence, they have preserved many customs and beliefs of their ancestors, as well as the dialect of the older coastal Negro. An oxcart jogging along a tree shaded road is a familiar sight and, with the guidance of a Negro boy named Julius [Bailey], we discovered instances of crude wooden implements in common usage. The many negroes interviewed gave a graphic picture of survival elements that have persisted since the days when slave ships brought their ancestors to the new country...”³⁰



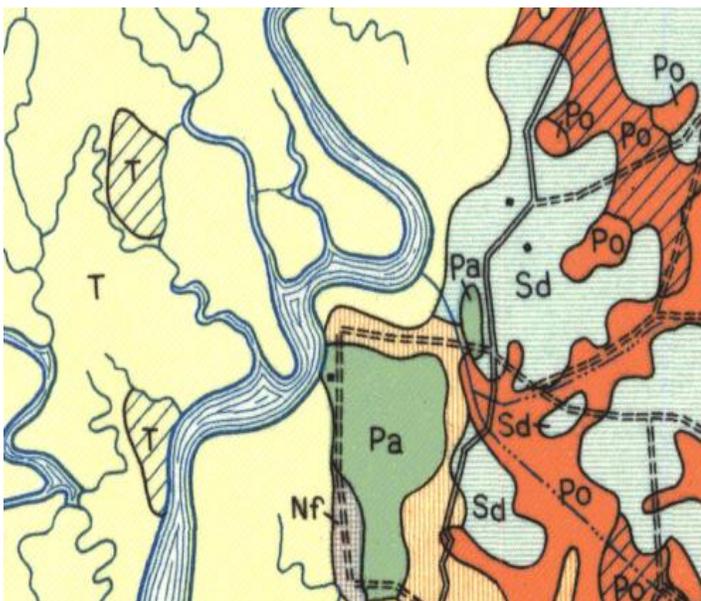
Nero Jones, Belle Marsh Sapelo Island.



Sea Island cotton field.

In summary, Raccoon Bluff was a sizeable community that lasted from the early 1870s to about 1960, when the tract was dissolved of black family ownership by land rearrangement and land swaps by R.J. Reynolds in the 1950s and early 1960s. During that time the people of Raccoon Bluff relocated to Hog Hammock. The community was completely extinguished by 1964, leaving Hog Hammock as the only African-American settlement on Sapelo (see Hog Hammock section below). Although the community was by then devoid of residents (Allen Green was the last to move to Hog Hammock in 1964), services continued to be held at the Raccoon Bluff church for several years. The congregation acquired land in Hog Hammock in 1963 and built a new First African Baptist Church, completing it in 1968.³¹

Kenan Place/Lumber Landing



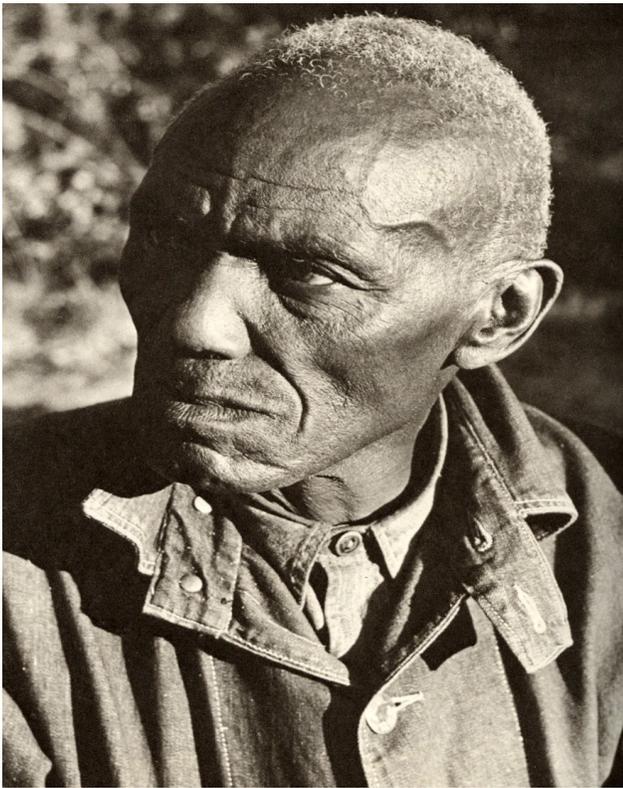
Kenan Place / Lumber Landing Dwellings, soil map 1929.

Kenan Place, now known as Kenan Field, was a 1,500-acre tract along the bend of the Duplin River on the west-central side of Sapelo Island. It had been acquired from the dissolved French Sapelo Company in 1802 by Thomas Spalding.

In 1835, it was awarded by Spalding as a wedding present to his daughter Catherine upon her marriage to Michael J. Kenan of Baldwin County, Georgia. Included in this transaction were 86 slaves, which worked the Sea Island cotton plantation at the Kenan Place until the start of the Civil War in 1861. The 1860 population census showed that 118 slaves lived at Kenan and Hanging Bull in 27 houses.

Several of the heirs of Michael Kenan, including members of the Kenan and Livingston families, resided on the property for several years after the Civil War. They never sold land on this tract to freed slaves, although one small black settlement did exist for several years after the war within the Kenan tract, at Hanging Bull. The original First African Baptist Church, established in 1866, was located at Hanging Bull, until the congregation moved to a new church at Raccoon Bluff. In 1873 there were 141 congregants counted at the First African Baptist Church.³² Due to the increasing size of this church, the Second African Baptist Church was organized in 1884, this congregation being established at Hog Hammock. The small Hanging Bull settlement disappeared after the 1898 hurricane with the removal of its residents to Raccoon Bluff and Hog Hammock.

Most of the original Kenan Place tract was acquired by Amos Sawyer of Northampton, Massachusetts upon his purchase of the majority of the North End in 1881. This acquisition also included High Point, Chocolate, Bourbon, Mackays Old Fields, Lumber Landing and King Savannah. In 1885, as noted above, Sawyer sold 60 acres to Caesar Sams



Shad Hall, Sapelo Island 1938.

at Lumber Landing on the Duplin River and a settlement developed there over the ensuing three decades. There were a sawmill and timber loading docks on the river frontage there, hence the community's name. By the late 1920s, the settlement at Lumber Landing had declined to only two families, from a population of 41 persons in 1910. The 1930 federal census counted only two households at Lumber Landing—Mattie Sams and Janie Sams.³³

Many of Sapelo Island's residents engaged in livelihoods centered upon commercial timber and fishing activities from the mid-1880s through the first three decades of the 1900s

and the Kenan Field section was a focal point. There was a sawmill on the north end of Kenan Field with access to the Duplin River, while numerous oyster beds in the Duplin provided seasonal income during the cooler weather months. The prolific lumbering activity centered around Darien from 1865 through 1920 saw timber ships utilizing anchorages in Doboy and Sapelo sounds to load yellow pine timber harvested in the interior of Georgia and processed by McIntosh County sawmills. The mills and the loading of timber and processed lumber on the ships in the sounds on both ends of Sapelo provided employment opportunities for a number of the island's Geechee residents.³⁴

South End (Spalding Place)

Sapelo South End was a tract of about 5,000 acres acquired from the agents of the dissolved French Sapelo Company in 1802 by Richard Leake of Belleville plantation, McIntosh County. The negotiations for this transaction were completed by Leake's son in law, Thomas Spalding, upon the sudden death of Leake later in 1802. South End, through the agricultural energies and resourcefulness of Spalding, evolved into the largest and most productive plantation on the island with Sea Island cotton, sugar cane and provision crops cultivated at several locations, including Long Tabby, Kenan Place, New Orleans and Flora Bottom. Spalding built a tabby cane press and sugar mill at Long Tabby fronting on Barn Creek, and manufactured a high grade of sugar from 1809 until ca. 1840.³⁵ Slave settlements affiliated with these operations were located at nearby Bush Camp Field, Behavior and Hog Hammock.³⁶

In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War the federal Freedman's Bureau determined that there were 352 freedmen living on Sapelo Island (see distribution of residents covered earlier). Additionally, several Spalding heirs lived on the South



Sawmill , Sapelo Island, Georgia 1920s.



Julius Bailey and ox cart at Sapelo Island, 1938.

End at varying times during the Reconstruction and postbellum periods prior to the acquisition of most of Sapelo by Howard E. Coffin in 1912.³⁷

These were: Thomas Spalding II (1847-1885), grandson of Thomas Spalding, had the largest portion of the South End, including the remains of the Spalding main house which had sustained considerable damage through vandalism and neglect during the war years.

Thomas Bourke Spalding (1851-1884), Thomas II's brother, and grandson of Thomas Spalding, had the Marsh Landing tract of about 1,500 acres and built ca. 1880 the still-existing house at the end of the Duplin River causeway where he lived with his wife Ella Patience Barrow Spalding.

Sarah Spalding McKinley (1844-1916), sister of Thomas II and Thomas Bourke and granddaughter of Thomas Spalding, had the Barn Creek and Riverside tracts in the Long Tabby section of the island, in which there grew up the "Barn Creek Community" comprising the few white residents of the island during the 1870s and 1880s. A.C. McKinley (1842-1917) of

Baldwin County, husband of Sarah, built the still-existing residence on Barn Creek just south of the Long Tabby sugar mill.³⁸ Mrs. McKinley was the island postmaster from 1891 until her death in 1916.

For a number of years, from 1870 to ca. 1900, the Spalding descendants were virtually the only white families on Sapelo. There were a few other white families at Kenan Place (Kenans, Livingstons), at High Point and on the lighthouse island (Cromleys). The three Spalding families engaged in cattle raising activities on Sapelo in the 1870s and early 1880s, selling fresh beef to the captains of the timber ships in Dobby and Sapelo sounds. They also operated a small steamboat service, transporting passengers and freight between Sapelo, Dobby Island and Darien.³⁹

There was a pre-Civil War slave settlement at Behavior-Bush Camp Field, two adjoining tracts immediately east of Spalding's Long Tabby sugar mill and agricultural complex and convenient to the largest field on the island (present air strip) where Sea Island cotton and sugar cane were cultivated in the antebellum period. Behavior-Bush Camp Field was



South End House as restored by the Macon Hunting Club, 1912.

apparently abandoned as a settlement by the late 1870s and Behavior subsequently had become the island cemetery by the mid-1880s. Some of the earliest marked burials on this four-acre plot are dated 1889 and 1890.⁴⁰

Another African-American settlement, not precisely located but thought to be in the southwest part of Sapelo, was Drink Water. This unusual name likely originates with a personage peripherally associated with the island named Drinkwater.⁴¹



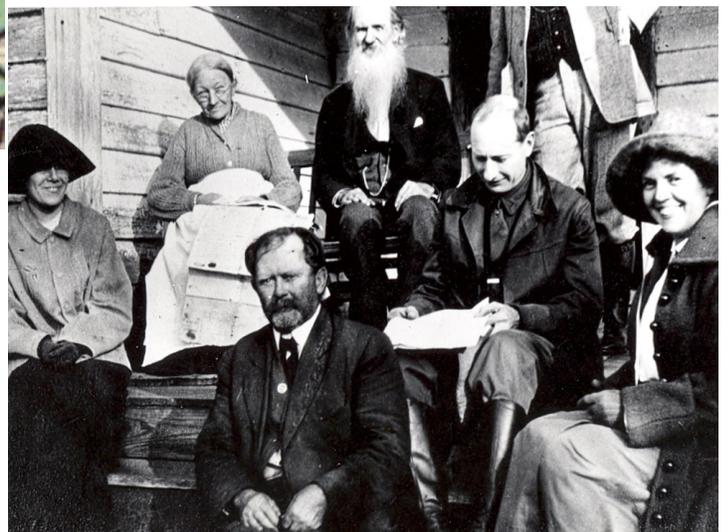
Shell Hammock, soil map 1929.

Kenneth H. Thomas notes that Charles Hall, Sr., in a 1964 interview, said that Drink Water, “must have been in the South End-Kenan Field area” where Liberty Bell and Sam Grovner lived after the Civil War. Liberty Bell is listed in the McIntosh County censuses of 1870 and 1880 and apparently lived near the white Spalding-McKinley residential area in the Long Tabby-Riverside section, thus likely placing the small Drink Water settlement in that area, certainly *south* of Kenan Field and probably *north* of Long Tabby-Riverside.

In 1878, Thomas Spalding II began selling plots of land on the South End. McIntosh County deed records indicate that in May and September of that year he sold small tracts in what are now Hog Hammock and Shell Hammock. Shell Hammock was a tract slightly west of the present Marine Institute. There were black residences and a praise house at Shell Hammock until the settlement was acquired by R.J. Reynolds ca. 1960, as part of his land exchanges with the island’s Geechee residents during the 1950s and early 1960s.⁴²

Following the accidental death of her husband in 1885, the widow of Thomas Spalding II, Sarah McKinley Spalding, married William C. Wylly of Darien. The Wyllys began selling off the remaining portions of the South End in the first decade of the twentieth century.⁴³

By 1910, the white influence on Sapelo Island had greatly declined, most particularly in terms of the Spaldings and their allied families. That year, the Scottish-American Mortgage



Mr. and Mrs. Coffin with A.C. McKinley, and Sarah Spalding McKinley in 1913.



Praise House on Sapelo Island 1940s.

Company acquired much of the Sapelo South End acreage (not including Hog Hammock and Shell Hammock), these being the last of the original Spalding family holdings on the island.⁴⁴ This large tract was immediately sold to the Sapelo Island Company of Macon, Georgia for use as a sportsmen's retreat. This entity began refurbishing the main house as a hunting lodge in 1911. However, the Macon group's interregnum on Sapelo was short-lived as the company sold the South End to Howard E. Coffin of Grosse Pointe, Michigan in 1912. Coffin consolidated Sapelo's various land holdings from their multiple owners, excepting the several African-American communities, into his sole ownership, for a sum totaling about \$150,000.⁴⁵ The only whites living on Sapelo in 1910 were Archibald C. McKinley and his wife Sallie (Spalding) McKinley, and her brother-in-law Charles

Bass, at Barn Creek near the Long Tabby, two Cromley families living in a pair of dwellings at the lighthouse, and two other families living at Riverside just north of Long Tabby.

The 1929 soil survey map for McIntosh County identifies a network of sandy roads, irrigation ditches, docks and numerous assorted residential and agricultural structures scattered over much of Sapelo Island. Shortly after World War I (1917-18) during which Coffin had spent much of his time in

Washington assisting the U.S. War Department, Coffin acquired several small tracts at the Shell Hammock settlement, as well as land at Barn (Post Office) Creek, near the Long Tabby, including that of the McKinleys, by then deceased, and the Treanor family. Coffin's arrangement with the few white residents of Sapelo when he bought the island in 1912 was the right of first refusal of their property upon their death or moving from the island. In this manner, Coffin eventually came to own all the former Spalding, and allied, family, lands on the island, exclusive of the various Geechee communities. Coffin also acquired the 200 acres of Little Sapelo Island across the lower Duplin River from the main island, in 1920, as well as the small marsh hammocks along the Duplin north of Little Sapelo (Mary, Fishing, Pumpkin and Jack hammocks).

Coffin thus owned most of Sapelo from 1912 to 1934. In the latter year, amidst financial losses incurred through his development of the Sea Island Company, and severely aggravated by the onset of the Great Depression, he sold Sapelo to Richard J. Reynolds, Jr. of Winston-Salem, North Carolina.⁴⁶

There continued to be pockets of white settlement on Sapelo South End from ca. 1920 to ca. 1933. These included members of the Cromley family, the Sapelo lighthouse keepers; various contractors and workmen associated with Coffin's restoration of the main house (completed 1925), and his drainage, agricultural, road building and seafood packing operations on the island in the 1920s; also, the Hackels at Riverside, adjacent to and just north of the Long Tabby tract. Emanuel Hackel managed the commissary at the oyster and shrimp cannery on Factory (Barn) Creek, while his wife, Annie,



Building Roads on Sapelo Island 1920s.



Alexander Wyllie survey map of South End Sapelo Island 1897.

was the postmaster for Sapelo in the 1920s (the post office at this time was in the commissary). Several other white people lived in the Barn Creek-Riverside section, these mostly being associated with the oyster cannery, plus there was Coffin's yacht captain and engineer occupying the house on the Marsh Landing causeway built years earlier by Thomas Bourke and Ella Spalding. Crook, et. al. cites one white person living at Raccoon Bluff, Katie Campbell, the teacher at the Rosenwald school in that settlement.

The 1929 soil map is quite detailed as it delineates a number of structures associated with these activities, including the restored Long Tabby sugar mill as a residence, with its accompanying swimming pool, the Factory Creek commissary and oyster cannery, the Coffins' main house, his South End

farm complex (present Marine Institute site) and numerous residential structures in the Geechee communities on Sapelo.⁴⁷

The 1930 federal census listed 345 Geechee and 52 whites living on Sapelo, this being the peak period of Coffin's island operations prior to the economic downturn occasioned by the Great Depression. Among the occupations listed in the census for the Geechee people of Sapelo were housekeeper, dragline operator, foreman for road building, dairyman, stock farm manager, laundress, carpenter, herdsman, gardener and fisherman.⁴⁸

Later, the South End devolved to ownership of the Sapelo Island Research Foundation (SIRF), established by Reynolds in 1949 and managed by his Estate following his death in 1964. In 1976, the SIRF sold the South End to the State of Georgia. This transaction included a small tract at the primary mainland



Sapelo Island Commissary & Post Office 1940s.

access point to Sapelo Island, Meridian landing, but did not include Hog Hammock. The sale was facilitated through various funding sources, including federal monies from the U.S. Department of Commerce, by which the Sapelo Island Estuarine Sanctuary (present National Estuarine Research Reserve) was designated as a marine protected area. There are 6,100 acres now comprising the Reserve, including tidal salt marshes and forested uplands of the south and southwest sections of the island, including the Long Tabby administrative area, Nannygoat Beach and the area incorporating the UGA Marine Institute campus and associated docks and facilities. On December 21, 1976, the State of Georgia leased for a period of fifty years to the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia the premises, properties and facilities of the South End. This lease and agreement was amended between the Department of Natural Resources and the Board of Regents in July 1994, updating the original agreement and extending the lease to fifty years from the date of the amendment.

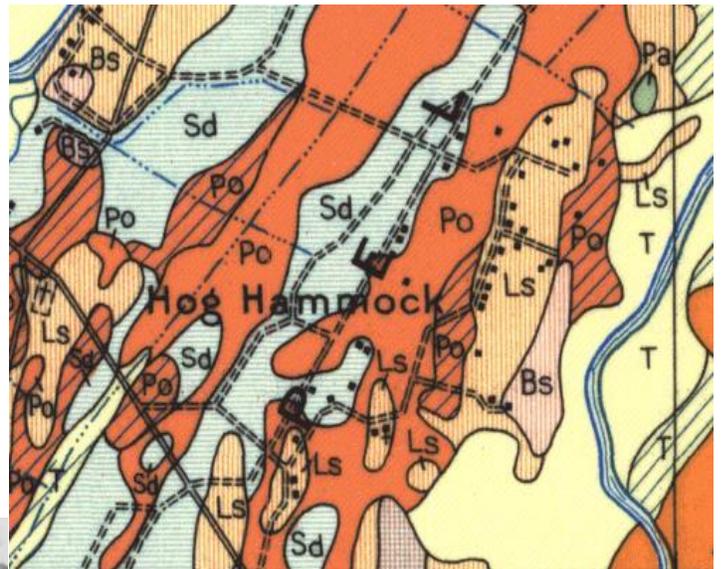


Harvesting oysters on Sapelo Island 1920s.

Hog Hammock

There was a slave community at Hog Hammock and its adjacent tracts, Behavior and Bush Camp, prior to the Civil War. The place name "Hog Hammock" first appears on a pre-Civil War map resulting from a topographic survey of Sapelo Island conducted by the U.S. Coast Survey in 1856-57. The Coast Survey map also delineates Spalding South End, Chocolate and "Spanish Fort" (shell ring).⁴⁹ According to a 1963 interview with Charles Hall (1874-1967), the source of the community's name was that of his paternal grandfather, Sampson Hogg, who was in charge of maintaining hogs and other livestock for the Spalding plantation in that section of the island. Later, the family surname evolved from Hogg to Hall.⁵⁰

During the 1870s, much of the land in the present settlement was sold or awarded by deed of gift to freed slaves by Thomas Spalding II, owner of much of the South End after the Civil War. In 1884, the Second African Baptist Church, later renamed St. Luke's Baptist Church, was established from the First African Baptist Church at Hanging Bull. There were several community buildings at Hog Hammock for the



Hog Hammock, soil map 1929.

Masons, the Eastern Star and the Farmers Alliance, in addition to a school and several stores. Hog Hammock was configured in detail on the first formal land plat and survey of the settlement, conducted in 1891 by Alexander C. Wylly, McIntosh County surveyor. The 1891 plat defines a very similar grid and layout of the community as it appears in the present day. Excepting Raccoon Bluff, Hog Hammock was the most populous black settlement on the island in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



Allen Green spent most of his life living at Raccoon Bluff.

The 1910 census showed that Hog Hammock, and adjacent Johnson Hammock, had 163 residents in 33 households, being largely comprised of the Bailey, Carter, Dixon, Sams, Johnson, Hillery, Lewis and Jackson families. Occupations for the Geechee residents of Hog Hammock (and for many others on the island) at this time were primarily invested in farming, the commercial harvest of oysters, and the loading of timber in Sapelo Sound.

According to the 1930 census, as noted earlier, there were about 350 Geechee residents on Sapelo, many employed by Howard Coffin's Sapeloe Plantation, an operation that included the oyster cannery on Factory Creek, a small boat yard and marine railway on the South End and various construction projects for residences, shell roads, artesian wells, and agricultural fields with accompanying networks of irrigation ditches. These, and other, activities provided ample opportunities for employment.⁵¹ In 1930, the census listed 37 residential dwellings for Hog Hammock and adjoining Johnson Hammock. One white resident was listed as living at Hog Hammock in 1930, the aging retired lighthouse keeper, James Cromley, who ran a general store in the settlement.⁵²

In the early 1950s, Richard J. Reynolds, Jr. and his various attorneys⁵³ initiated the process through land exchanges to consolidate the Geechee residents of Sapelo into one

community at Hog Hammock, thereby enabling Reynolds to acquire the properties of the various black settlements in other parts of the island. The primary of these was Raccoon Bluff, but also included land at Belle Marsh, Lumber Landing and Shell Hammock, as well as some scattered small individual plots on both the North and South End of the island.⁵⁴ Reynolds did this with the intention of transforming everything north of the South End into a wildlife and hunting preserve, with limited access.

According to *Sapelo Voices*, "Reynolds wanted to consolidate his Sapelo properties and purchased some lots, plus pressured the exchange of other properties on the island for property at Hog Hammock during the 1950s. By 1964 all of the Geechee families of Sapelo Island had been joined, many against their desires, in the single community of Hog Hammock. Reynolds failed to obtain clear title to a few tracts apparently, by 1964. Incentives for relocation included construction of new homes with electricity and running water, a new church for the Raccoon Bluff congregation, and a new school."⁵⁵

By the time of his death in 1964, Reynolds had acquired virtually all the land on Sapelo outside of Hog Hammock, with the exception of a small portion of Raccoon Bluff.⁵⁶

In the mid-1950's, based on features identified in the 1954 U.S. Geological Survey topographic map of Sapelo Island, there were about forty dwellings in Hog Hammock housing approximately 250 people.

Island lore relates that the late Allen Green, who became well-known for the superior quality and craftsmanship of his sweet-grass baskets, was the last resident of Raccoon Bluff in 1907 and except for 14 years as a young man, lived there his whole life.⁵⁷ It was there, Green told William S. McFeely, "when he was eleven, that his grandfather gave him his instruction in basketmaking. And it was from the foot of the bluff that he and other boys would swim across to Blackbeard Island and walk round to the ocean side to ride the waves..."⁵⁸ For a long time Green supposedly refused to leave his Raccoon Bluff home place, but had been forced to do so, apparently, by 1964.

By this time, the entire upper two-thirds of the island had been completely de-populated by Reynolds to facilitate the development of his hunting preserve and game refuge. Ironically, Reynolds never realized his goal in this regard—following several years of health problems he died in late 1964 in Europe at the age of 58.⁵⁹



This picture depicts is a typical style Rosenwald school house.

Hog Hammock is now a 434-acre historic district listed (1996) on the National Register of Historic Places. The community is bounded by marsh on the east and southeast, a road to the west and a northern boundary that was originally an irrigation canal and bank which separated the South End division of the island from the North End division. There are about 50 houses scattered in an irregular pattern through the community. Among these are several historic structures, including the St. Luke's Baptist Church (built ca. 1924), the Farmer's Alliance Lodge Hall (ca. 1929), First African Baptist Church (1968), and the former Rosenwald school (ca. 1931), now a church school building. The historic wood-frame houses are largely simple, vernacular-style structures, one-story and most with gabled roofs and front porches. Kenneth H. Thomas, in his survey of Hog Hammock preparatory to its approval for listing on the National Register, indicated in his documentation that many of the residential structures in Hog Hammock were built in the period 1920-1940 and others date from the post World War II era. Other houses, many also in the vernacular style, were built during the 1950s and 1960s with the gradual infusion of residents from the other settlements on the island.

State of Georgia Acquisition, 1969-1976

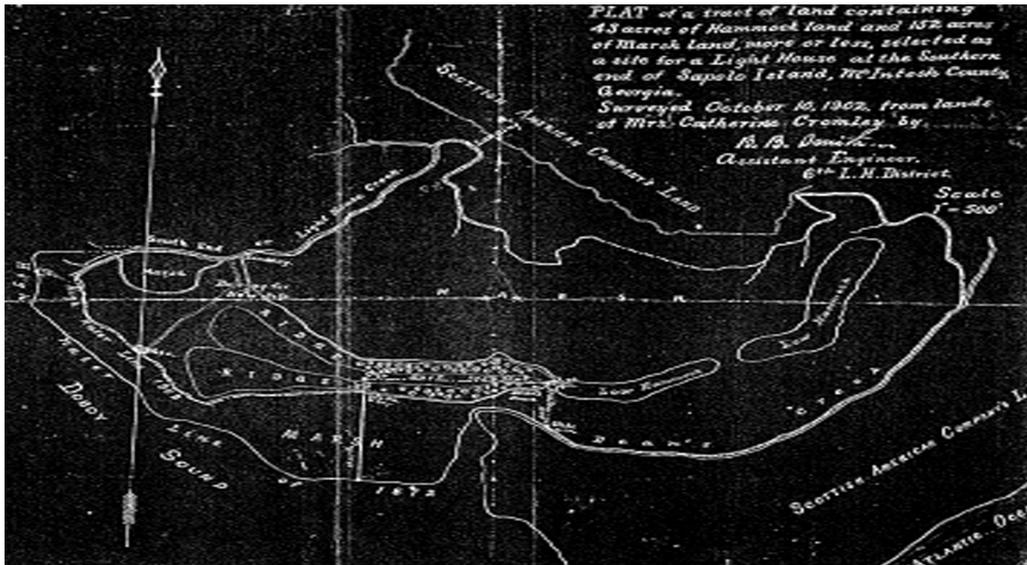
The interest of Reynolds in marine and ecological science, and the maritime dimension in general, was certainly an important catalyst toward what has evolved into the current preservation of Sapelo Island. Pursuant to this interest Reynolds established the Sapelo Island Research Foundation (SIRF) in 1949 and, in 1953, provided to the University of Georgia facilities on Sapelo for the conduct of scientific field investigations for marsh ecology and related studies. This initiative became the UGA Marine Institute, enabled by Reynolds' provision of buildings, boats and docks on the South End at his former dairy complex for the research laboratory.⁶⁰ Reynolds' widow, Dr. Annemarie Schmidt Reynolds, continued this legacy by remaining active on the Board of the Reynolds'

foundation (SIRF). In 1969, she arranged for the State of Georgia to purchase the North End of Sapelo, comprising roughly the upper two-thirds of the island, after which was established what became the Richard J. Reynolds Wildlife Management Area, to be managed by the Georgia Game and Fish Division (present Department of Natural Resources). This acquisition was made by the State with the assistance of federal Pittman-Robertson funds. The acquisition included the uninhabited sites of the former African-American communities of Raccoon Bluff, Lumber Landing, Belle Marsh and Hanging Bull, among others, areas that had been acquired by Reynolds in the 1950s and early 1960s through the previously described land exchanges with the residents.

In 1976, the SIRF sold the South End to the state, comprising the remaining one-third of the island, and also under the management of the Department of Natural Resources. In December 1976, as a condition of federal Department of Commerce (NOAA) funds used to acquire the SIRF properties on the South End, the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Sanctuary was created for the preservation of the estuarine environment.⁶¹ Under this arrangement, public access was made available to Sapelo Island for the first time in 1977 and daily ferry service between the island and mainland was inaugurated in 1978.



*Seated: Univ. of Georgia President Aderhold, Richard J. Reynolds, Jr.
Standing: EJ Kuenzler, LR Pomeroy, EP Odum in UGAMI library.*



Lighthouse Tract Surveyed for Mrs. Catherine Cromley on October 10, 1902.

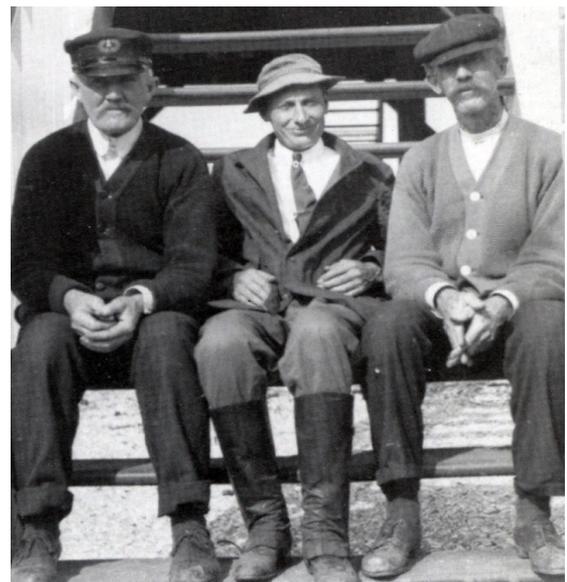
Lighthouse Tract

This tract was originally a separate small island separated from the main island by marsh and South End Creek, and was apportioned to Thomas Spalding's purchase of the South End in 1802 from the French Sapelo Company. In 1808, Spalding deeded five acres to the federal government. A brick 80-foot harbor lighthouse was built in 1819-1820 under federal contract by Winslow Lewis. Except for a brief interruption during the Civil War, this lighthouse with its fourth order Fresnel lens operated continuously from 1820 to 1905, in tandem with a smaller range beacon across the mouth of Dobby Sound on Wolf Island. The Sapelo light, still standing, was deactivated following foundation damage incurred as a result of the 1898 hurricane.

In the late 1870s Thomas Spalding II deeded several acres of land on the lighthouse island to James Cromley, Sr., three generations of whose family served as keepers of the Sapelo light from 1873 until the cessation of lighthouse operations in 1933. The U.S. Lighthouse Service conducted an updated survey of the lighthouse island in 1902 pursuant to the construction of a new tower necessitated by the damage sustained to the brick tower in the hurricane. A third order 125-foot steel lighthouse, with two attached frame keepers houses, was completed in 1905, this complex being situated just north of the present tower. The son and grandson of James Cromley, Sr., and their families, resided on the lighthouse island in these structures from 1905 until the mid-1930s when the houses and tower were dismantled and removed from the island. This second lighthouse served local shipping traffic until operations were suspended in 1933.⁶²

The lighthouse tract of 195 acres (upland and salt marsh) was sold to R.J. Reynolds by the federal government in 1950.

Reynolds built a causeway through the marsh linking the tract to the beach road. Upon the sale of the South End of Sapelo to the State of Georgia by the SIRF in 1976, there was a one-half interest each in the tract between the State and the Estate of the second wife of R.J. Reynolds, Marianne O'Brien Reynolds. Following their divorce in 1952, Marianne Reynolds held her half-interest in the tract after which it devolved to her heir and sister Dorothy E. Cook of New York City upon Marianne's death in 1985. In 1993, the State purchased this half of the lighthouse tract from Mrs. Cook for \$500,000, with the assistance of a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce.⁶³ The tract was thus incorporated into the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve, managed by the Georgia DNR. The abandoned brick lighthouse was restored as a working aid to navigation and opened to the public in 1998.



Howard Coffin sitting between James Cromley Jr. and his son Robert Cromley before the 1933 deactivation.

Land Use in Relation to Investigative Archaeology:

William McKinley & Clarence B. Moore at Sapelo Island

Researched and Written by Aimee G. Gaddis

Postbellum census records indicate that the African American communities were at their peak population on the north end of Sapelo Island at the close of the nineteenth century. During these years two interesting visitors found their way to Sapelo. They were two men who came and documented a culture and society of people in which very little was known at the time.

In a newspaper article published on November 22, 1898 in the *Savannah Morning News* the reporter led with a caption stating, "No Treasure Ever found in the Mounds and No Giants Either." These sentiments were apparently typical of the widespread misconceptions of the undocumented aboriginal societies of pre-Columbian coastal Georgia during the late nineteenth century.⁶⁴

In 1872 William McKinley a lawyer from Milledgeville, Georgia, submitted a paper in the *Smithsonian Annual Report*, based on his investigations of Native American burial mounds on Sapelo Island in the spring of 1871. His report documents his observations during a visit to his son and daughter-in-law, Archibald C. and Sarah Spalding McKinley (granddaughter of Thomas Spalding, late patriarch of Sapelo Island).⁶⁵

Twenty-five years later, in 1896, Clarence Bloomfield Moore, a wealthy Philadelphia professor, and his staff arrived to make their first investigations of the buried archaeological evidence of the vanished aboriginal societies who had lived, hunted and fished on Sapelo Island several thousand years earlier.

While McKinley and Moore had very different professional backgrounds, their common interests, observations and written reports of the mound complexes on Sapelo provided later generations of researchers and laymen alike with an interesting insight into the pre-historical inhabitants' of the island.

At the time of Moore's explorations in the southeastern United States, the field of archaeology was in its infancy. C.B. Moore's interest in the aboriginal societies was sparked at the age of 40 after reading a series of articles published in the *American Naturalist* between November 1892 and June 1894 on the "Shell Heaps of the St. Johns River." Moore's meticulous attention to detail in the methodology of his field collection and

subsequent documentation of thousands of aboriginal sites visited by he and his staff, used continuously through the years. Moore began his explorations by chartering two steam vessels, the *Osceola* and the *Alligator*. He later purchased the latter outright. He quickly realized the need for a custom designed research vessel and in 1895, the *Gopher* of Philadelphia was moved south and re-configured to suit his requirements at the Merrill-Stevens Engineering Company in Jacksonville, Florida.⁶⁶ This steamer was designed to navigate the shallow coastal rivers to access remote areas, to serve as an onsite laboratory during the field seasons, and to be used as a field repository for his growing collections. It was the *Gopher* that was in operation in 1896 and 1898 during Moore's visits to Sapelo Island.⁶⁷

Moore's career in U.S. southeastern archaeological research spanned several decades, from 1894-1918. He and his staff traveled both in the Gulf of Mexico and the southeastern Atlantic coast, plus making several trips along the interior rivers.⁶⁸ The field work was generally conducted from October to April after which Moore would return to Philadelphia for the summer to rewrite his field notes and make public his latest research.⁶⁹

William McKinley, on his 1871 field visit to Sapelo, describes in detail several shell mounds on the island, with a map accompanying his submission to the 1872 *Smithsonian Annual Report*. His report documents the location of three burial mounds, noting that "great mound-circles were doubtless for councils or games." He included a mound on the south end of the island near the present main house named "Druid Grove," or "Spalding". (This mound complex was not noted in Moore's reports later).

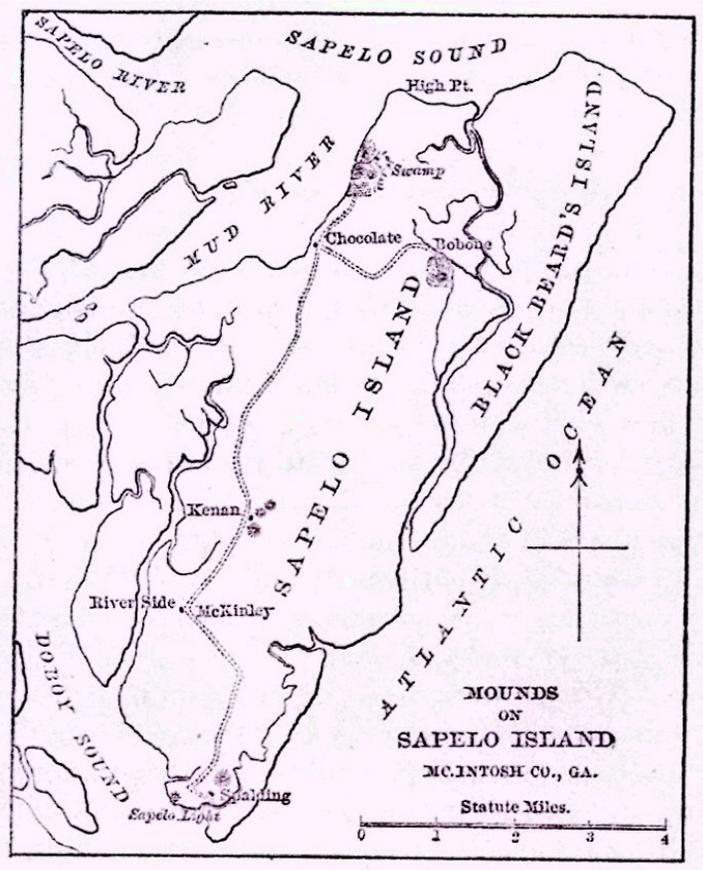


The "Gopher" of Philadelphia on the Tombigbee River in Columbus, Mississippi, in 1901. (photograph courtesy of Lowndes-Columbus Public Library, Columbus, Mississippi).

McKinley states in his report regarding the mound complex located in the center of the island, "These cemetery-mounds are very ancient." He adds, "Sapelo Island is famous for its wonderful moss-hung live oaks; but the largest bodied tree on the island, one over 4 feet in diameter at the stump, and 7 feet in height, to just below the first fork, grows on top of the biggest burial mound at the place marked "Kenan."⁷⁰ Moore did not excavate this area as he was denied access to the mound complex in Kenan Field by the land owner, Spalding Kenan, son of Catherine Spalding and Michael J. Kenan.⁷¹

Both McKinley and Moore investigated the Bourbon Field mound complex on the northeast side of the island, the property of Amos Sawyer of Massachusetts from 1881-1912. Each noted in their respective reports that this area contained the largest of the burial sites they observed on the island. Moore's primary archaeological investigations in 1896 and 1898 occurred in the Bourbon area of the island, this also being the site of the landing, or anchorage, for the *Gopher* according to Moore's field notes.⁷² McKinley's 1872 report for the Smithsonian includes a description of a complex located on the eastern side of the island in a place he identifies as "Bobone field" a colloquial term used by the African Americans residing in the area.⁷³ This area was clearly Bourbon Field, named by Picot de Boisfeuillet, one of the French loyalists involved in the purchase of the island in 1789 by the French Sapelo Company.⁷⁴

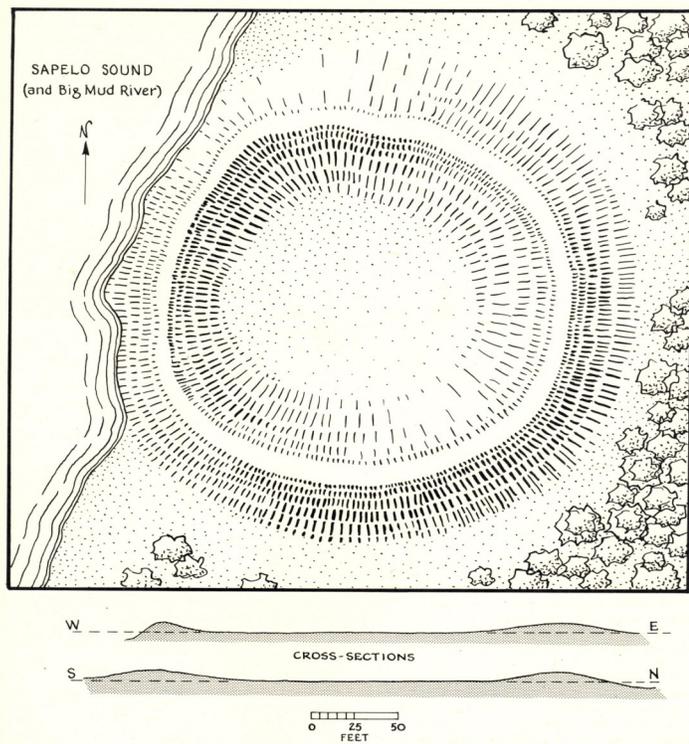
There were two mounds recorded in Bourbon by Moore, who documented 192 points of human remains being encountered, noting that 115 skeletons were found.⁷⁵ His report noted that the two mounds were 150 yards apart, the largest measuring 72 feet in diameter at the base, and 8 feet in height, the second being 38 feet in diameter at the base, and 3 feet, 4 inches in height. It is interesting to note that in 1871, when McKinley measured the mound, he recorded the largest as 70 feet in diameter at the base, and 9 feet in height; and nothing for the smaller one, McKinley adding that the "entire surface of which field is dotted and white with hundreds of shell-mounds, from 2 to 4 feet high, and from 15 to 50 feet base."⁷⁶ It is certain that both men were in the same area but they recorded two very different observations. It is therefore difficult to determine whether the two observers saw things differently, or that 25 years of land use, perhaps cultivation, or climatic impacts altered the Bourbon site. It is known that considerable agricultural activity occurred at Bourbon Field during both the antebellum and postbellum periods.



William McKinley's Map of 1872 that was included in Smithsonian Institution Report.

Moore included an additional site in his report that was not previously documented by McKinley. However, McKinley did acknowledge the following: "None others are known; but very much of the intervening central part of the island is impenetrable palmetto thicket, and it is possible other mounds exist in this thicket". Moore's investigations did, however, divulge an additional mound he located and documented as being in Dumoussay's Field (referenced in earlier documents as Mackay's Old Fields). His notes indicate that this mound is "N.N.W. of Bourbon" and could be reached by water by way of a tidal creek that runs north of Bourbon Field. This stream is clearly McCoys Creek, which branches off Blackbeard Creek north of Bourbon, easily accesses the upper end of Dumoussay's Field, and flows due west of High Point on the northern tip of Sapelo. The mound investigated here by Moore was a burial site and he documents the skeletal remains were met with at fifty one points with a total of 42 skeletons.

Perhaps one of the most well-known and visited areas of the "lost society" is on the northwest side of the island, this being the "Shell Ring". This ceremonial formation has been researched, recorded and speculated about for the past 140 years in numerous written records.



This drawing was published in The Collected Works of Antonio J. Waring, Jr. papers of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology Harvard University Cambridge, Massachusetts volume 58,. The complete set is often referred to as "the Waring Papers". The drawing first appeared in C.B. Moore's research and reappeared in A.J. Waring Jr.'s report. A.J. Waring first visited Sapelo island under the invitation of Mr. R. J. Reynolds in September of 1949. While C.B. Moore and William McKinley both recorded visual descriptions of the Shell Ring or as C.B. Moore termed it an "Aboriginal Enclosure at High Point," A.J. Waring Jr. along with Lewis H. Larson were the first to excavate and document their findings of the Shell Ring located near High Point on Sapelo Island.

William McKinley's observations on the shell ring note, "South of High Point there are three mound-circles, having plain areas. No. 1 is in 240 feet wide; 9 feet high; base, 30 feet; no gateway; built of earth and shells, densely overgrown with live oak, palmetto, myrtle, grape-vines, which perfectly mask it; western side built along the very edge of the table land; so as to front a salt marsh and the Mud River as a wall 20 feet high; on the north, skirting a fresh water flag and bulrush marsh or stream, 150 feet wide, separating it from circle No. 2, which is 210 feet wide, in an open field long cultivated; mound now rising 3 feet on 20 feet base, composed of shell and earth; area plain. Circle No. 3 is 150 feet wide, just like No. 2. These circles are surrounded by hundreds of shell mounds, about 3 feet high, on bases of 20 to 50 feet, which crowd, without visible order, a field of one hundred acres or more, bounded on the west by salt marsh and inland salt river, and on the east by fresh-water jungle. On all these shell-mounds and over all the plain are found fragments of Indian

pottery, both plain and ornamented. No funeral-mounds are nearer than three miles. The shells are all of mollusks yet living in the neighboring waters, the oyster, clam, conch, scallop, & c., which fact, and the broken pottery, show plainly that these shell-mounds, indicated by dots on the map, in countless number, are ancient camps of the Indians or mound-builders, where they dwelt, while the three great mound circles were doubtless for councils or game."⁷⁷

Clearly from McKinley's 1872 description the area was large and somewhat disturbed, likely as good and abundant source for oyster shells for use in the construction of tabby buildings on Sapelo Island, ca. 1809-1860, and the base layer for the network of roads.

Moore titled the shell ring in his publications as the "Aboriginal Enclosure at Sapelo High Point." His description notes: "On Sapelo High Point, near the northwest end of Sapelo Island, overlooking Sapelo Sound and at periods of storm, washed by the water of Big Mud River which had laid bare a section of the walls, is an almost circular aboriginal fortification or ceremonial enclosure." Moore gives the physical characteristics of the ring as having "a diameter, including the walls, of somewhat over 300 feet. The walls have an average height of from 5 to 7 feet, and a thickness of about 50 feet at the base. They are flattened on top where at present they have an average width of from 10 to 15 feet. They are covered with forest trees, and are composed exclusively of shells, mainly those of the oyster, with the usual midden refuse intermingled, such as fragments of bone bits of earthenware, and the like."⁷⁸

One difference in the findings of the two gentlemen's archaeological observations is noted in Moore's report: "Earthenware in fragments, shattered bones of the deer and a fragment of a temporal bone from a human skull were met with." It appears because Moore was excavating and McKinley was only observing at the time he submitted his report in 1872 that their interpretations of the shell ring mounds being used for burials are contradictory. A.J. Waring found no burial remains in his excavation in 1949. In Waring's report he concludes that "The ring most certainly does not resemble other shell heaps found along the rivers and coast of the Southeast. The Sapelo shell ring then very likely represents a ceremonial or social arrangement rather unusual in this geographical location and time horizon."

The careful observation and the process of documenting their findings in the late nineteenth century by McKinley, C.B. Moore, and A. J. Waring Jr. have provided remarkable insight and an excellent research platform for subsequent generations of archaeologists and anthropologists.

Notes

1. The acreage includes upland and tidal salt marsh. For the ecological and topographical characteristics of Sapelo Island, see A.H. Johnson and S.S. Hillestad, eds., *An Ecological Survey of the Coastal Region of Georgia* (National Parks Service Scientific Monograph Series, 1974) and *The Ecology of the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve* (Sapelo Island NERR and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 1997).
2. There is the possibility of an additional settlement on the island. *Drums and Shadows*, a study of African-American cultural traditions published in 1940, in its chapter about Sapelo Island, mentions a praise house at "Silver Bluff" in the 1930s (p. 169), and displays a photograph (Plate XVIII) depicting a simple wood-frame structure with a brass bell at the entrance). The exact location of "Silver Bluff" had not been ascertained with any degree of certitude at the time of this writing and no mention of the site has been found in any of the primary or secondary literature relevant to Sapelo Island. Nonetheless, it is possible that Silver Bluff existed and was a small settlement as well. *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes* (Federal Writers Project, University of Georgia Press, 1940). Cornelia Bailey relates that at one time there were three praise houses on Sapelo, these being at Hog Hammock and Shell Hammock on the South End, with the third at Lumber Landing.
3. Kenneth H. Thomas, principal investigator, "National Register of Historic Places Registration Document for Hog Hammock and Behavior Cemetery (Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division, 1996). Cited hereafter as Thomas, National Register of Historic Places document.
4. National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 105, Records of Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, E-1002, "Unregistered Letters, 1867-1868."
5. In addition to Thomas, cited above, the following sources will be extensively cited throughout this paper. These are based on primary source materials as well as data gleaned from the compilations of oral histories among island residents. Ray Crook, Cornelia Bailey, Norma Harris and Karen Smith, *Sapelo Voices: Historical Anthropology and the Oral Traditions of Gullah-Geechee Communities on Sapelo Island, Georgia* (State University of West Georgia, 2003), hereafter cited as Crook, et al., *Sapelo Voices*; William S. McFeely, *Sapelo's People: A Long Walk into Freedom* (W.W. Norton, 1994), hereafter cited as McFeely, *Sapelo's People*; and Buddy Sullivan, *Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater: The Story of McIntosh County and Sapelo* (County Board of Commissioners, 2001, 6th edition), hereafter cited as Sullivan, *Early Days*.
6. Population data is extracted from United States Census, Population Schedules, Georgia, McIntosh County, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920 and 1930. For amplification and analysis of 1910 and 1930 data see also Crook, et al., *Sapelo Voices*.
7. Sullivan, *Early Days*, chapters 13 and 14, particularly pp. 488-98, discusses in detail the local timber and lumber shipping industry. See also by the same author, *High Water on the Bar: An Operational Perspective of a Tidewater Timber Port* (Darien Development Authority, 2009), particularly the introduction, which details this activity. Sailing vessels, and later, steamships, called at loading docks to deposit rock ballast and load lumber at tiny Hazzard's Island at the head of Front River, and further down Front River on the west side of Creighton Island at docks known officially as "Sapelo, Ga.", for the post office that was located there for several years. This activity was severely impacted by the hurricane and tidal wave of October 1898 as detailed in Sullivan, *Early Days*, 511-14.
8. Crook, et al., *Sapelo Voices*.
9. Harold H. Martin, *This Happy Isle: The Story of Sea Island* (Sea Island Company, 1977).
10. Sullivan, *Early Days*, chapter 16, comprehensively covers Coffin's activities on Sapelo Island, 1912-1934, as well as his creation of the Sea Island Company and the Cloister Hotel on Sea Island.
11. Thomas, National Register of Historic Places document; Sullivan, *Early Days*; Martin, *This Happy Isle*; Patrick Reynolds and Tom Shachtman, *The Gilded Leaf: Three Generations of the R.J. Reynolds Family and Fortune* (Little, Brown & Co., 1989).
12. Crook, et al., *Sapelo Voices*. The outstanding account of life and tradition among the Sapelo Geechee community during this period is Cornelia Walker Bailey, *God, Dr. Buzzard and the Bolito Man: A Saltwater Geechee Talks About Sapelo Island* (Doubleday, 2001).
13. Thomas, National Register of Historic Places document.
14. Crook, et al., *Sapelo Voices*
15. Montalet died at High Point in 1814. He was the son-in-law of Picot deBoisfeillet, one of the six French investors in the Sapelo Company, 1789-1795. The tabby foundation remains of Montalet's house at High Point overlooking Sapelo Sound are still in evidence on Sapelo's North End. See Buddy Sullivan, *Ecology as History in the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve*, Occasional Papers of the Sapelo Island NERR (Sapelo Island NERR, 2008), 21-22; also, Thomas, National Register of Historic Places document.
16. Sullivan, *Early Days*, chapter 7, and appendices, outline in detail the operations and management of the Spalding plantations on Sapelo Island, 1805-1861. The same source also analyses the agrarian philosophy of Spalding, as does his biography by E. Merton Coulter, *Thomas Spalding of Sapelo* (Louisiana State University Press, 1940). For additional insights on Spalding see Buddy Sullivan, *Old Tabby: The Ashantilly Legacy of Thomas Spalding and William G. Haynes* (Lower Altamaha Historical Society and the Ashantilly Center, Inc., 2009).
17. Robert L. Humphries, ed., *The Journal of Archibald C. McKinley* (University of Georgia Press, 1991). This document is a first-hand contemporary account of postbellum Sapelo Island, 1869-1876. McKinley (1842-1917) of Baldwin County, Georgia, married Sally Spalding, granddaughter of Thomas Spalding. The McKinleys, for a short time, lived at High Point, then later in the home they built on Barn Creek, just south of the Long Tabby. See also Sullivan, *Early Days*, chapter 12, for extensive annotation of salient portions of the McKinley Journal.
18. Thomas, National Register of Historic Places document.

19. Thomas, National Register of Historic Places document; Sullivan, *Early Days*.
20. McFeely, *Sapelo's People*, 141-42.
21. Ibid.
22. Resurvey of Raccoon Bluff tract by Paul Wilder for Georgia Department of Natural Resources, 2000.
23. Crook, et al., *Sapelo Voices*; McFeely, *Sapelo's People*.
24. Federal census, 1880, agricultural schedules, cited in McFeely, *Sapelo's People*, 143.
25. McFeely, *Sapelo's People*, 143.
26. Crook, et al., *Sapelo Voices*. For Belle Marsh, see Cornelia Walker Bailey, *God, Dr. Buzzard and the Bolito Man*, op. cit.
27. U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Soil Survey of McIntosh County, Georgia*, Series 1929 (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1930).
28. Thomas, National Register of Historic Places document.
29. McFeely, *Sapelo's People*; Thomas, National Register of Historic Places document. Sullivan, *Early Days*, 511-14, details the severity of the October 2, 1898 hurricane that struck the Georgia coast. Sapelo lore tells the story of the Raccoon Bluff church being constructed of lumber gathered from the marsh that had been swept over to Sapelo by the hurricane. This story has merit. A portion of the U.S. Marine Hospital Service South Atlantic Quarantine Station, consisting of several wood-frame structures, was on the south end of Blackbeard Island, almost directly across the marsh from Raccoon Bluff. For the quarantine station, see Sullivan, *Early Days*, 474-88. It operated from 1880 to 1910, being started largely as a result of a terrible yellow fever epidemic that struck Savannah in 1876, claiming 1,066 lives.
30. *Drums and Shadows*, op. cit., 158-59.
31. Crook, et al., *Sapelo Voices*; McFeely, *Sapelo's People*; Bailey, *God, Dr. Buzzard and the Bolito Man*, op. cit.
32. Thomas, National Register of Historic Places document.
33. Crook, et al., *Sapelo Voices*; McFeely, *Sapelo's People*.
34. Sullivan, *High Water on the Bar*, op. cit., Introduction. There was an African-American settlement on the north end of Creighton Island in the 1890s and early 1900s for workers at the timber loading grounds in Sapelo Sound. It is possible that some of Sapelo Island's people employed in this activity lived there seasonally during timber loading activity, October through April. The people of this settlement accessed the loading grounds by way of a tidal creek to Hazzard's Island at the juncture of Front River and Sapelo Sound. There was a store and loading docks at Hazzard's. This and other sections along the Front River, at Dog Hammock and at the Blackbeard Island Quarantine Station were sites for the deposit of rock ballast from ships arriving from Europe to load lumber. The Introduction to *High Water on the Bar*, cited above, includes details about the ballast hammocks in the area. See also Sullivan, *Early Days*, 450-52, 478, 489-93.
35. Sullivan, *Early Days*, 101-107, et. seq. Spalding led a revival of the use of tabby among the coastal planters and businessmen of the antebellum period. His formulaic approach to tabby making was adopted by many of his contemporaries. Examples of the Spalding method of tabby are in evidence not only in the ruins of structures on Sapelo Island, but throughout coastal Georgia and South Carolina. See also Sullivan, *Ecology as History*, op. cit., and by the same author, *Tabby: A Historical Perspective on an Antebellum Building Material in McIntosh County, Georgia*.
36. Thomas, National Register of Historic Places document.
37. The postbellum period on Sapelo Island, 1865-1912, and the activities of the Spalding, McKinley, Kenan and Wyllly families on the island, is covered in detail in chapter 12 of Sullivan, *Early Days*. See also, Humphries, ed., *Journal of Archibald McKinley*, op. cit.
38. Humphries, ed., *McKinley Journal*, op. cit., Sullivan, *Early Days*, chapter 12.
39. Ibid.
40. Tradition has an earlier cemetery called New Orleans on the south end of the island in the vicinity of Hog Hammock. This burial ground almost certainly dates to the Spalding plantation period. At the time of this writing (2012) archaeological investigation has not precisely located the New Orleans cemetery. Thomas, National Register of Historic Places document; Crook, et. al., *Sapelo Voices*. See also various archaeological field reports on file at Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Division, Atlanta.
41. Kenneth H. Thomas, email communication, 18 January 2012. Capt. Rotheus Drinkwater was the son in law of James Shearwood, the latter owning land on Sapelo, possibly in connection with commercial live oak timber cutting for shipbuilding purposes. Drinkwater administered Shearwood's estate upon Shearwood's death in 1819. See also Sullivan, *Early Days*, 92, and McFeely, *Sapelo's People*, 101.
42. Crook, et al., *Sapelo Voices*; Thomas, National Register of Historic Places document.
43. The younger Spalding died in unusual circumstances, being crushed in a railroad accident in Macon. A year earlier, his brother Thomas Bourke Spalding, was killed on Sapelo Island from the accidental discharge of his shotgun during a hunting outing. Sullivan, *Early Days*, 403-04.
44. Two exceptions to this transaction were the small tract on Barn Creek near Long Tabby owned by Archie and Sallie Spalding McKinley, and a larger tract that included the Marsh Landing section owned by C.O. Fulton of Darien.
45. Sullivan, *Early Days*, 599-604, cites McIntosh County deeds documenting the various land transactions by which H.E. Coffin acquired most of Sapelo. Brief overviews of Coffin's early life and his career with the Hudson Motorcar Company are provided in Maxwell Taylor Courson, "Howard Coffin: King of the Georgia Coast," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 83, Summer 1999, and Burnette Vanstory, *Howard E. Coffin* (Sea Island Company, 1969). These papers also relate Coffin's acquisition and development of Sea Island and the Cloister resort starting in 1926, along with his young cousin, Alfred W. Jones, Sr.
46. McIntosh County Deed Records, April 1934, cited in Sullivan, *Early Days*, 657-58.
47. Crook, et al., *Sapelo Voices*, various references. Sullivan, *Early Days*, 600-650, details the various operations of Coffin and Bill Jones on Sapelo Island for the period of the 1920s and early 1930s. Interestingly, during this time, the name of the island was spelled "Sapeloe" as Coffin employed the former English spelling of the island. The ending "e" was deleted

by Reynolds and the traditional spelling of "Sapelo", as used by Thomas Spalding and his heirs, was thus restored.

48. U.S. Census, 1930, cited in Crook, et al., *Sapelo Voices*, 28.

49. Sullivan, *Early Days*. The Coast Survey of the United States was a systematic charting of the waters of the nation, both inshore and offshore. This work, including the topographical mapping of barrier islands, tidal marshes and mainland areas, as well as the hydrographic charting of tidal waterways along the coasts, was carried out throughout the 19th century by the federal agency established in 1807. In 1878 it became the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey and, in 1970, the present National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Sullivan, *Early Days*, details the work of the Coast Survey in McIntosh County waters, including those around Sapelo Island.

50. Crook, et al. *Sapelo Voices*; McFeely, *Sapelo's People*, 83-84; Thomas, National Register of Historic Places document.

51. Crook, et al., *Sapelo Voices*.

52. Ibid.

53. Darien attorney Paul Varner represented many of Reynolds' local legal interests in the 1940s and 1950s.

54. Thomas, National Register of Historic Places document; Crook, et al., *Sapelo Voices*.

55. Crook, et al., *Sapelo Voices*, 37.

56. Thomas, National Register of Historic Places document; Crook, et al., *Sapelo Voices*.

57. McFeely, *Sapelo's People*, 142.

58. Ibid. Allen Green related to the present writer in the early 1990s of his occasional forays to Blackbeard Island from Racoon Bluff. He recalled the great prevalence of the Eastern Diamondback rattlesnake there, and some of the ruins of the abandoned quarantine station, once an important aspect of Blackbeard's history (note 29).

59. A somewhat biased account of the life of R.J. Reynolds, Jr., including his association with Sapelo Island from 1934 to 1964, is Reynolds and Shachtman, *The Gilded Leaf: Triumph, Tragedy and Tobacco, Three Generations of the R.J. Reynolds Family and Fortune*, op. cit.

60. Management Plan (Revised), Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve, 2008-2013. After the failure of his short-lived commercial venture on Sapelo, the Sapeloe Plantation Inn, in 1952, Reynolds decided to pursue the establishment of a foundation to support the study of estuarine ecology and biology. A visit by President O.C. Aderhold of UGA, with other key faculty members resulted in the signing of an agreement in the summer of 1953 for the new marine research laboratory on Sapelo Island. The early impetus for the development of marsh ecological studies at Sapelo was promulgated through the energy and direction provided by Dr. Eugene Odum of the University of Georgia. Odum appointed Dr. Robert A. Ragotzkie as the first resident director of the Marine Institute. The barn, apartments, shop facilities, marine railway and Reynolds' utility vessel, the Kit Jones, were all turned over to UGA as the new lab developed through the 1950s and early 1960s. By the late 1950s the Marine Institute staff included Ragotzkie, a hydrologist, Lawrence R. Pomeroy, an invertebrate zoologist, and John Teal, an ecosystem ecologist. The outstanding biography of Odum is Betty Jean Craigie, *Eugene Odum: Ecosys-*

tem Ecologist & Environmentalist (University of Georgia Press, 2001). See also Charles Seabrook, *The World of the Salt Marsh* (University of Georgia Press, 2012) and John and Mildred Teal, *Portrait of an Island* (New York, 1964), the latter account being an outstanding natural history study of Sapelo. A synopsis of the first 40 years of scientific research at the Marine Institute is contained in Management Plan (Revised), Sapelo Island NERR, 1995 edition.

61. The Sanctuary, now Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve (SINERR), was the second such site designated under the federal Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce. At present (2012) there are 28 designated sites in the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, including Sapelo. See the SINERR Management Plan (Revised), 2008 edition, for a comprehensive review of the history, management, operations and administration of the SINERR.

62. Lighthouse operations on Sapelo Island from 1820 to 1933 are covered in detail, with an accompanying series of archival photographs, in Sullivan, *Early Days*, 125-28, 416-26, and 666-74. Information on visiting the lighthouse may be obtained at www.sapelonerr.org.

63. Management Plan (Revised), Sapelo Island NERR, 1999 edition, Appendix F.

64. Chris T. Trowell, "Georgia Archaeology at the Turn of the Century: Newspaper Reports," in *Profile Papers: Technical Papers from the First Seven Issues of the Society for Georgia Archaeology Newsletter, August 1968-March 1992*. Society for Georgia Archaeology, Special Publication 1, 1992.

65. William McKinley, "Mounds in Georgia," in *Smithsonian Institution, Annual Report for 1872*, 27: 422-28, cited hereafter as "Mounds in Georgia." Details of McKinley's visit to Sapelo Island, aside from his investigative findings, are covered in Buddy Sullivan, *Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater*, 791; and Robert L. Humphries, ed., *The Journal of Archibald C. McKinley*, 69, entries for April and May, 1871.

66. Charles E. Pearson and C.C. Birchett and Richard A. Weinstein, "An Aptly Named Steamboat: Clarence B. Moore's Gopher," *Southeastern Archaeology*, Vol 19, No. 1, Summer 2000.

67. Clarence B. Moore in *The Georgia and South Carolina Coastal Expeditions of Clarence Bloomfield Moore*, edited and with an Introduction by Lewis Larson (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1995, reprint of Moore, *Certain Aboriginal Mounds of the Georgia Coast* (Philadelphia, 1897), cited hereafter as *Certain Aboriginal Mounds*.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid.

70. McKinley, "Mounds in Georgia."

71. Moore, *Certain Aboriginal Mounds*.

72. Ibid. A small, unnamed, tidal creek emptying into the larger Blackbeard Creek a short distance to the east, affords convenient access to the northeast upland portion of Bourbon Field. This landing may have been developed by Amos Sawyer shortly after his acquisition of the North End in 1881. See the North End section in the present paper.

73. Ibid.

74. Martha L. Keber, *Seas of Gold, Seas of Cotton: Christophe Poul;ain DuBignon of Jekyll Island* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2002). This definitive account has extensive material relating to the activities of the Sapelo Company on Sapelo Island, much of it gleaned from original French sources. See also Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., "The Sapelo Company: Five Frenchmen on the Georgia Coast, 1789-1794 in *Proceedings and Papers of the Georgia Association of Historians* 19: 37-64, 1989; and Buddy Sullivan, *Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater*, 80-89, 763-65, 822.

75. Moore, *Certain Aboriginal Mounds*.

76. McKinley, "Mounds in Georgia."

77. Ibid.

78. Moore, *Certain Aboriginal Mounds*.

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Geechee Communities on Sapelo Island

