

# **Coastal Georgia Historical Society**

Fifty Years of Living History 1965–2015

## Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the Coastal Georgia Historical Society is to aid in the administration, restoration, and maintenance of those historic facilities and resources entrusted to its care so they will be preserved as a living part of the historical and cultural foundations of our coastal community. The Society is dedicated to collecting, restoring and housing artifacts reflective of the culture and history of Coastal Georgia and to promoting awareness, knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the heritage of the area.

# Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The Early Years: 1965-1975	2
A Decade of Expansion: 1976-1985	5
A Commitment to Excellence: 1986-1995	10
A Master Plan to Fulfill Our Mission: 1996-2005	17
Realizing Dreams: 2006-2015	23
The Future	31
Society Presidents	32
Society Directors	33
The Cunningham Bowl	34
The Rodriguez Service Award	35
2015 Board of Directors	36
2015 Staff Members	37



#### Introduction

In 1965, a small group of local residents formed the Coastal Georgia Historical Society with an ambitious vision: to lead in the preservation of the artifacts and buildings that are the treasures of our coastal heritage. Their goal was to match the best historical societies in existence. The momentum and enthusiasm generated in the Society's first year has never abated. Today, as owner of the St. Simons Lighthouse and the A.W. Jones Heritage Center and custodian of the Lighthouse Keeper's Dwelling and the Historic Coast Guard Station at East Beach, the Society has become the guardian of coastal Georgia history and a driver of heritage tourism. These sites are essential pieces of our collective history. They are also alive with vibrant interpretation of our cultural resources, telling our coastal story through tours, lectures, exhibits, and other educational programs. This history presents highlights from the Society's first fifty years.

## The Early Years: 1965-1975

Under the leadership of Brunswick Junior College president Earl F. Hargett, a group of community leaders formed the Coastal Georgia Historical Society in 1965 "to collect, preserve and perpetuate the historical heritage of the South Georgia coastal region." Temporary storage for documents, maps, photographs, and other artifacts of local interest was provided by Brunswick Junior College. predecessor to the College of Coastal Georgia. It soon became apparent that the Society needed its own facility to exhibit and store the growing collection. The solution to this dilemma was found when the Society learned that the Keeper's Dwelling, the historic companion to the St. Simons Lighthouse and the island's oldest intact brick residence, was being designated as surplus property by the Federal government and might be sold to the highest bidder. Albert Fendig, Jr., and other Society leaders launched a community initiative to preserve the Dwelling as a coastal history museum. As a result of their efforts, the building was conveyed to the Glynn County Board of Commissioners on August 25, 1971, with the stipulation that it be used "as and for an historic monument, and for no other purpose." The Society immediately began setting up exhibits in the Dwelling, and a preview opening was held on December 18, 1971.

In 1972, the Lighthouse and Keeper's Dwelling property was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Local author and historian Burnette Vanstory had unearthed evidence that Charles B. Cluskey, one of Georgia's leading architects in the 1830s and 1840s, had constructed the buildings. Meanwhile, a successful fundraising campaign resulted in the award of two Federal grants providing matching funds to restore the Dwelling. The restoration project began in 1974 under the leadership of local architect W.S. "Smitty" Ledbetter, Jr., and Southern decorative arts expert Henry D. Green, using original designs located by Burnette Vanstory.

On July 7, 1975, the restored dwelling opened as the Museum of Coastal History. Volunteers from the Cherokee Garden Club acted as hostesses, and docents wore period dress including pinafores. The Society named Anne Shelander as its first director-curator and elected Mrs. Albert Fendig, Sr. (Gladys) as the first woman to hold the position of Society president.



The restored Keeper's Dwelling opens as the Museum of Coastal History in 1975.

Initial exhibits featured Native American history, plantation life, and Fanny Kemble; Vara Majette's original watercolors of coastal plantation houses; a desk purported to have belonged to General James Oglethorpe; and a typical Victorian parlor.

In the early years, the Society established a close relationship with bestselling author Eugenia Price, whose St. Simons Trilogy attracted thousands of visitors to the museum. Her historical novel *Lighthouse* featured James Gould, builder and keeper of the first St. Simons Lighthouse, as the main character. Price was a loyal supporter of the Society throughout her lifetime. In addition to serving as honorary chairman of an early fundraising campaign, Price held popular "autograph parties" at the Keeper's Dwelling, sometimes with her fellow writer and friend Joyce Blackburn. She also

donated a collection of research documents to the Society archives. Through grants from the Eugenia Price-Joyce Blackburn Charitable Foundation, the two authors, now deceased, continue to support the Society until the present day.



Eugenia Price at the site of the first St. Simons Lighthouse. An archaeological excavation conducted by Dr. Lewis Larson in 1972 located the foundations of the Lighthouse built in 1810.

During the first decade, the Society saw membership rise from 150 in 1965 to 586 in 1975. An expanding local archives found a new home, and an important historic structure was saved from commercialization. A coastal history museum opened to enthusiastic public response, with annual visitation numbering 20,000 in the first year.

## A Decade of Expansion: 1976-1985

Over the next decade, the Society expanded its educational outreach and more fully engaged the community in its programs. Major steps were also taken to develop the Society's archives and provide more space to support the growing number of activities.

The Society's commitment to children's education was evident from the beginning of the decade. In May 1976, almost 700 school children toured the museum. Twelve Glynn Academy students and four Eagle Scouts completed major projects at the site. In August of that year, a spinning festival was held on the museum lawn featuring preparation of fleece from sheep to sweater. Later, a fire pit was built behind the 1890 Oil House to conduct demonstrations on soap and candle making.

Sunday afternoon "rambles" to places of historic interest became a popular activity for adults. Local destinations included Cannon's Point, the Brunswick-Altamaha River Canal, and Elizafield Plantation. Longer trips took members to Sapelo, Little St. Simons, and Cumberland islands; Savannah; Sunbury; and the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Agrirama farm community in Tifton.

Three membership meetings – the Annual Meeting in January, a Spring and a Fall meeting – became an established part of the yearly schedule. Prominent scholars presented their latest research or most recent publications on coastal history and culture. Among the most notable were archaeologists Charles Fairbanks and David Hurst Thomas, Pierce Butler biographer Malcolm Bell, Jr., and local historians Bernard Nightingale and Charles Gowen. The Annual Meetings were held at The Cloister and the Spring and Fall meetings were usually held at Epworth-by-the-Sea.

During this decade, dedicated women and men established the docent and volunteer program that remains a vital component of Society operations. In the early days, museum docents were called the Do-C-Does, and in addition

to welcoming visitors to the museum, they organized orientation sessions and thank-you events.

An award for exceptional volunteer service known as the Cunningham Bowl was established in 1978. The sterling silver Revere bowl was given by Cunningham Jewelers, Brunswick, in memory of George C. Cunningham, founder of the store and himself a history buff. Society treasurer Everett J. Livesey was the first recipient to have his name engraved on the bowl. The first volunteer appreciation luncheon was held on September 23, 1985, at the King and Prince Hotel. Annual luncheons continue today, as does the award of the Cunningham Bowl at the Annual Meeting.

Historic preservation was an ongoing activity. In 1979, under the supervision of Henry Green, the Society made repairs to the Keeper's Dwelling to correct moisture damage, including installation of a new roof and chimney caps, exterior and interior painting and replastering, and the addition of a larger heating and air conditioning unit.

During the same year, Green organized the Friends of the Lighthouse, a support group to provide funding for special Society requests. Early projects included conservation of the Cannon's Point Plantation painting, construction of fencing in front of the Dwelling, and purchase of a James Hamilton Couper manuscript. Now known as the Friends of Coastal Georgia History, the organization continues to award grants to the Society for historic preservation and collections-related projects.

In June 1980, a "Keeper's Store" opened in the 1890 Oil House next to the Lighthouse. The store quickly became a successful income-producing venture, offering models of shrimp boats and sail boats for children and decorative items for adults, such as needlepoint kits of the Lighthouse and letter openers and ash trays with the Lighthouse seal. Today, the Museum Store in the Heritage Center continues to generate significant income for the Society, offering books on Georgia and island history, gift items, and a charming children's section.

As the need for operating funds increased, the Society was pleased to receive in 1980 the first of three annual grants from the Institute of Museum Services. The next year, the Society took steps to ensure future financial stability. After receiving a \$35,000 three-to-one matching grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, a successful campaign was launched to fund a \$140,000 endowment trust. The trust had been established in 1975 with \$7,750. That endowment has grown to \$1.6 million today.

Under the direction of Director-Curator Anne Shelander, procedures for registering all artifacts acquired by the museum were approved by the Board in 1981. This was the first step toward achieving museum standard collections management. Volunteers were trained to accession, mark, and store artifacts. Implementing these procedures would prove important when the Society applied for national accreditation ten years later.

Shelander also organized an ambitious series of exhibits during the decade. "The Brunswick Waterfront Discovery" featured artifacts from an archaeological excavation of the historic port area, including some of the first Roman pottery discovered in the New World. "Cannon's Point Plantation," which displayed artifacts representing the cotton planter's life, contained the first of many items that would be donated to the Society from descendants of plantation owner John Couper.

In 1983, "American Tools of Yesterday" showcased about 140 tools and objects from local donors. A Sea Island cotton scale, a wagon maker's "traveler" measuring tool, and a wire mousetrap were displayed as part of this very popular exhibit. "Sentinels of the Sea: American Lighthouses and Their Impact on Our History," which opened in 1985, became the Society's first traveling exhibit. Featuring photographs and information about selected lighthouses across the nation, the exhibit traveled to venues in Georgia and other southern states.



Anne Shelander, first Director-Curator (1975-1987) with Don Carter, Society President (1985-1986) at the opening of the "Sentinels of the Sea" exhibit in the Keeper's Dwelling.

In the mid-1980s, three significant events furthered the Society's mission and laid the groundwork for future growth. In 1984, the U.S. Coast Guard placed the St. Simons Lighthouse under Society stewardship, which added climbing the tower to the museum experience. Also, the Society's Endowment Trust bought the St. Simons Post Office property on Beachview Drive to secure the site for future expansion.

In 1985, Beverly F. Davis donated her two-story beach house to the Society; it was moved from the east side of Twelfth Street to the south side of the Lighthouse. A \$50,000 grant from the Coastal Highway District Commission provided funds to move the building and repurpose it as administrative, curatorial, and storage space.



The Davis House served as headquarters for the Society from 1986 to 2008.

During the Society's second decade, the Keeper's Dwelling and Lighthouse became the center of Society activities, providing an array of learning experiences for members, visitors, and school children. A solid foundation was laid before the organization expanded in new directions.

#### A Commitment to Excellence: 1986-1995

On August 4, 1986, the Davis House officially opened as the administrative headquarters of the Society. The first floor contained a work area for volunteers, two offices, storage space, and a kitchen. On the second floor, a new archives area had been designed for the Society's collection of manuscripts, historical photos, books, paintings, graphics, and other artifacts, previously stored in the Keeper's Dwelling. A separate climate control system and extra insulation maintained constant temperature and humidity in the space, providing superior conditions for conservation of the collections.

The following year, preliminary planning for a significant Lighthouse restoration and construction project began. Local architect Lamar Webb assisted the Society in preparing plans to reconnect the Dwelling and the Lighthouse as originally constructed. These exciting plans, as well as routine maintenance of the Dwelling, required new funding sources. In January 1988, the first in a series of galas was held, with dinner and a fashion show at The Cloister. This event raised \$7,000 for preservation of the Lighthouse. The following year, a second gala featured the New Orleans Preservation Hall Jazz Band, and \$11,000 was raised. Subsequent galas, featuring pianist Roger Williams, trumpeter Al Hirt, satirist Mark Russell, and singer Brenda Lee, provided additional funds for preservation and education projects.

In 1990, the first phase of the Lighthouse restoration project included cleaning and painting the brickwork, cast iron gallery, and lantern room, as well as repair and replacement of windows. On the dome at the top of the lantern room, workers discovered copper sheathing under layers of black paint and asphalt. After careful cleaning, the copper was left uncovered to weather naturally.

The following year, during the repair and painting of the lighthouse interior, workers discovered that each step of the cast iron staircase had been numbered 1 to 129 and marked "Saint Simons." Cleaning of the interior masonry revealed that the Savannah gray bricks and mortar were in good condition. The connection between the Lighthouse and Keeper's Dwelling was rebuilt, with the addition of a public bathroom and a ramp for the disabled. The work was funded by two grants from the National Park Service Lighthouse Bicentennial Fund, as well as proceeds from the galas and ticket sales.

During this period of site improvements, a Victorianstyle gazebo was given to the Society by the Butler Mews Homeowners Association. The structure stood on the grounds of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Strachan Cottage, which overlooked St. Simons Sound. Originally built to cover a water cistern, the structure had been redesigned as a gazebo in 1976. After being moved to the Lighthouse grounds in 1988, the gazebo became a popular venue for weddings, school tours, and summer concerts, while also serving as a shady resting place for visitors to enjoy the view of St. Simons Sound.



The gazebo being moved from the Strachan Cottage property to the Lighthouse grounds in 1988.

Also in 1990, the Society launched what would become its most popular lecture program, inspired by the summer institute held in Chautauqua, New York. The first series of nine programs was held on Monday mornings throughout the summer. Lecturers spoke on a variety of topics, including "The History of Little Saint Simons Island," "Life and Lore of Rafting and the Coastal Rivers," and "Antiques: Our Link to the Past." Later on, the series would be developed around a central theme. Through the years, a wide range of topics has been covered, such as "Colonial Archaeology: Local Projects," "The Lighthouses of Georgia," "Food for Thought: Savoring South Georgia Cooking." "Georgia in Revolution," and "Immigrants: Georgia's Heritage." The 2011 Chautauqua Series entitled "Cannon's Point: Examining a Local Treasure" was the first to be moved to an evening timeslot and drew a record total attendance of nearly 1,000 people. These series, as well as other educational programs, were often supported by funding from the Georgia Endowment for the Humanities (later Georgia Humanities Council).

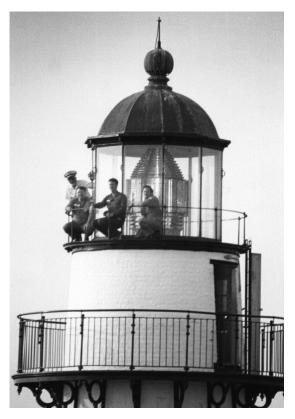
Confirmation of the Society's commitment to professional excellence came in 1991, when the Museum of Coastal Georgia received accreditation from the American Association of Museums. This is the highest honor a museum can receive and requires a comprehensive process of selfstudy, followed by on-site peer review. At the time, the museum was one of only nine accredited institutions in Georgia. The visiting team stated: "This museum is blessed with energy, directed by committed staff, board and volunteers. It tells a story important to local and national history, cares for its collections and its historic buildings, and works effectively towards strengthening its organization and interpretive capabilities." Also in 1991, the Society received a national award from the American Association for State and Local History for outstanding contributions to historic preservation and interpretation of local history.

A number of exhibits were presented during this busy decade. One of the most significant was the 1987 exhibition,

"Not Soon Forgotten: Cotton Planters and Plantations of the Golden Isles of Georgia, 1784-1812," which was accompanied by a series of five lectures by renowned scholars. Director-Curator Anne Shelander called it "...one of the most important assemblies of rare manuscripts, historical artifacts and other memorabilia that has ever been collected under one roof in the South." The exhibit included objects on loan from the National Archives, the National Gallery (Washington, D.C.), the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Telfair Academy, and the Hargrett Library at the University of Georgia. T. Reed Ferguson, a former Society Board member, served as guest curator. Ferguson's extensive work on the exhibit inspired him to write a book about Cannon's Point Plantation, published in 1994 and entitled *The John Couper Family at Cannon's Point*.

In October 1992, the Society implemented a plan to achieve greater visitor satisfaction by installing long-term exhibits about local history in the Keeper's Dwelling. An exhibit presenting the history of the Golden Isles and the Lighthouse was designed for the first floor gallery of the Dwelling. On the second floor, four period rooms were created to interpret the life of the keeper and his family between 1872 and 1900. The Keeper's Store was moved from the Oil House to the Dwelling, consolidating admissions and museum store sales. The Society collaborated with the U.S. Coast Guard Academy Museum, the National Archives, the Jekyll Island Museum, the Georgia State Archives, the Great Lakes Lighthouse Association and the U.S. Lighthouse Preservation Society to document the period room furnishings.

A significant partnership for stewardship of the St. Simons Lighthouse was formed in May 1994, when U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 10-10 took over light keeping duties from the Coast Guard. Since that time, this invaluable team of volunteers has performed weekly maintenance to keep the 19<sup>th</sup> century Fresnel lens turning precisely and shining brightly as an Active Aid to Navigation.



The Coast Guard Auxiliary has maintained the Lighthouse lens since 1994. Early team members included (left to right) Captain Burney Long, Bob West, Jeff Cole and Bill Wallace. *Photo courtesy of Jerry Matherly, The Brunswick News.* 

The Society's most ambitious traveling exhibit to date opened in the historic Glynn County Courthouse on January 13, 1995. Entitled "Transatlantic Linkage: The Gullah/Geechee-Sierra Leone Connection," the exhibit was complemented by a day-long symposium held at The Cloister and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Six noted historians served as guest lecturers. The exhibit was the outcome of a 1993 trip to Freetown, Sierra Leone, by Society Director Linda King. There she had studied the cultural exchange between the West African coast and the Georgia and South Carolina sea islands as a result of the slave trade.

The trip was made possible through the International Partnership Among Museums. This institutional linkage program of the American Association of Museums arranged a cooperative exchange between the Society and the Sierra Leone National Museum. Awarded a First Place Local History Achievement Award by the Georgia Historical Society, the exhibit was described as "exceptional" for its interpretation of the West African slave trade and Gullah/Geechee culture. The exhibit won other prestigious awards and was chosen as an official event of the Cultural Olympiad, traveling to Atlanta for the 1996 Olympics. For a number of years, it traveled to sites throughout the Southeast. Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa visited the exhibit at a South Carolina venue and commented, "Thanks for reminding us of our ancestry."



"Dawn 'til Dusk," a batik by Frances Johnson was the signature image for the "Transatlantic Linkage" exhibit in 1995.

The third decade saw significant growth in the Society's commitment to educational outreach. In 1993 the Society partnered with the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation to develop a heritage education program for Glynn County schools. By 1995, the Society had assumed full responsibility for administering the program. Each summer,

workshops were held to provide teachers with curriculum-based lesson plans using area historic sites. For adult education, the Society formed a partnership in 1995 with eminent historian Buddy Sullivan, already a popular speaker at Society membership meetings. Sullivan developed a four-week course on the history of the Golden Isles and a five-week course on the history of St. Simons and Brunswick. Later consolidated as a six-week series on coastal Georgia history, Sullivan's courses have introduced thousands of people to the fascinating story of this region.

On October 22, 1995, members commemorated the Society's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a plantation supper at The Cloister's Rainbow Island. The fall newsletter contained a brief history of the organization, celebrating the years of growth, preservation, professional recognition, and community outreach that marked the first three decades.

# A Master Plan to Fulfill Our Mission: 1996-2005

The decade began with the 1996 opening of "Out of Ireland: The Story of Irish Emigration to America," a traveling exhibit with a multifaceted educational component. Curated by Director Linda King, the photographic exhibit was based on the collaboration between Academy Award winning film maker Paul Wagner and prominent historian Kerby Miller, tracing the migration of seven million Irish to the United States. Society staff and volunteers developed lesson plans and a teacher's packet about Irish history for Oglethorpe Point Elementary School third graders. The students spent a day at the museum filled with activities related to Irish culture, complete with a leprechaun. This was the Society's first initiative for the Glynn County School District's Partners-in-Education program. Also, an evening of Irish music and dancing was held at Glynn Academy to celebrate Irish immigrant descendants, particularly those from Glynn County. The exhibit later traveled to other sites in Georgia.

During the summer of 1998, the Society started a new tradition when the summer concert series "A Little Light Music," was first held on the Lighthouse grounds. These Sunday evening events continue today and attract thousands of Glynn County residents, as well as visitors to the Golden Isles, generating funds for museum projects.

In September 1999, the St. Simons Lighthouse Museum (formerly known as the Museum of Coastal History) was awarded the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual National Award for Museum and Library Service for its development and support of an outstanding heritage education program for school children. The program was in its sixth year of providing teacher workshops about the cultural resources of Glynn County. The award was presented at the White House by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, who said "...this honor is a tribute to the power of museums to engage children, families and communities, in towns and cities across the country."



The Society receives a National Award for Museum Service in 1999. Standing left to right: Linda King, Director (1987-2000); First Lady Hillary Clinton; Ruth Kolumber, President (1999-2000); Pat Morris, Curator and later Executive Director (2000-2010).

With continued dedication to education outreach, the Society participated in the Partners-in-Education program with Oglethorpe Point Elementary School for over a decade and developed Heritage Day, which gives students the opportunity to explore coastal Georgia culture, crafts, and industry. This annual event, now organized by the school, is still held each February.

In 2005, the Society became regional coordinator for National History Day, sponsored statewide by the Georgia Humanities Council. Students in grades 6-12 submit papers, performances, exhibits, and documentaries based on an annual theme. After being evaluated by volunteer judges, winners advance to the state contest. The Society still serves in this role today.

These educational programs were in addition to on-site tours offered to school groups from Glynn County and other parts of Georgia. Led by specially trained docents, the tours have introduced thousands of school children to the

Lighthouse and coastal history and continue to the present day.

During the fourth decade, two major steps were taken toward expanding both programming and facilities. The first was set in motion in 1995 when the Coast Guard Station at East Beach was decommissioned. This facility, authorized by President Franklin Roosevelt and built in 1936, was conveyed to Glynn County when Coast Guard operations moved to a new location. In 1996, the County licensed the Station to the Coastal Landmark Preservation Society, a local non-profit established by former Historical Society President Charles Spalding, to preserve the historic icon. The Landmark Society began raising funds for restoration and submitted a nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, which was approved on April 1, 1998. For several years the main building was used for exhibits and community meetings, while the boat garage became the location of Coastal Encounters, which offered nature camps for children.

In 2001, a merger agreement between the Coastal Georgia Historical Society and the Coastal Landmark Preservation Society secured the future of the Station. The Historical Society's Executive Director Pat Morris implemented plans to restore the buildings, in partnership with Glynn County. The project received major funding from the Transportation Enhancement Program of the Georgia Department of Transportation. Work included reroofing, replacement of aluminum windows with historically appropriate windows, updating wiring and plumbing, and installing a climate control system. Removal of exterior vinyl siding revealed the original wooden wall shingles in good condition. The exterior and interior were painted, and shutters in the style original to the building were installed.

The restoration was completed in February 2005. The Society Board then implemented plans to create a Maritime Center at the Station, with exhibits focusing on the natural history of Georgia's barrier islands and the Coast Guard experience, especially during World War II.

Another milestone was achieved in 2000, when the U.S. Postal Service relinquished its lease to the St. Simons Post Office building adjacent to the Lighthouse. The Society's Endowment Trust had owned the building since 1984; however, the title was encumbered by a lease to the Postal Service, which gave the lessee an option to buy the property at a discounted price until 2011. The Society membership and the coastal community had long been supportive of protecting from commercial development this part of the original property given by John Couper in 1804 expressly for the construction of a lighthouse. Honorary Trustee Albert Fendig, Jr., worked with U.S. Senators Max Cleland and Paul Coverdell and U.S. Congressman Jack Kingston to reach an agreement with the Postal Service. The ceremony transferring the post office site to the Society took place on March 11, 2000, with Senators Cleland and Coverdell in attendance.



Postmaster Rick Hankins (left) transfers the St. Simons Post Office property to Albert F. Shelander, Jr. (right), chairman of the Society's Endowment Trust, on March 11, 2000.

The "Founders 2000" Campaign was then launched to raise funds to develop plans for the site. Larger and more secure collections storage was urgently needed, as were meeting facilities, additional exhibit areas, and expanded administrative offices. Individual donors supported this planning effort. In 2002, the Society board commissioned the architectural firm of Lord, Aeck and Sargent of Atlanta to develop a master plan that included a new coastal heritage center on the Post Office site.



In 2004, Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton (seated) announces transfer of Lighthouse ownership from the Federal government to the Society under the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act.

In the midst of this planning, the Society learned about an opportunity to acquire the Lighthouse tower it had so carefully maintained since 1984. Through the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act, the Federal government sought to preserve lighthouses that were no longer in use by transferring ownership to qualified non-profit institutions. Executive Director Pat Morris carried out the rigorous, two-

year application process, and the Society was approved for the transfer. The recommendation was announced on May 26, 2004, when Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton visited the site and complimented the Society for its stewardship, saying, "Groups like the Society and its volunteers are the lifeblood of lighthouse preservation around the country." Transfer of ownership was made official at a celebration on July 11<sup>th</sup> immediately before the "Little Light Music" concert, when representatives of the U.S. Coast Guard "passed the torch" to the Society.

On October 23<sup>rd</sup> of the same year, Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue visited the site to announce the Society's plans for a new heritage center on the former Post Office site and a maritime center at the Coast Guard Station. The Governor kicked off the \$5 million Lighting Our Way Capital Campaign to fund the initiatives. At the same event, a \$2.5 million challenge grant from the G8 Summit Host Committee and the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation was announced, with each organization pledging \$1.25 million. The world had come to coastal Georgia in June 2004, when President George W. Bush hosted the G8 Summit of World Leaders on Sea Island. With the recommendation of Sea Island Company Chairman Bill Jones III, the G8 Summit Host Committee selected the Society initiatives as its Legacy Project to commemorate the conference. "The Coastal Georgia Historical Society has accomplished much in its 40 years of preserving the buildings, artifacts, documents, and stories of the region and interpreting them for residents and visitors alike," said Frederick E. Cooper, chairman of the Summit Host Committee. "Now the Historical Society stands on the threshold of an exciting opportunity to make more of the area's unique heritage available for more people."

## Realizing Dreams: 2006-2015

On April 29, 2006, the Maritime Center at the Historic Coast Guard Station opened, featuring seven galleries of interactive exhibits. The Lighting Our Way Campaign funded the exhibits. Visitors young and old were introduced to "Ollie," an imaginary "Coastie," who guided them through displays about the barrier island environment and the experiences of a St. Simons Island Coast Guardsman in the 1930s and 1940s. The exhibits were complemented by an orientation video *On the Edge*, which won a Telly Award in 2007. Planning began for a natural history education center for school children in the building behind the Station.



The restored St. Simons Coast Guard Station opened in April 2006. One of the first events held on the site was "Taps at Twilight" in May.

In 2006, the Lighting Our Way Campaign reached its \$5 million goal under the leadership of campaign chairs Marie Dodd and Jack Hartman. A groundbreaking ceremony for the new heritage center, designed by local architect John R. Rentz, was held on October 30<sup>th</sup>. The success of the campaign prompted the Kresge Foundation of Troy, Michigan, to offer a challenge grant of \$300,000 if the campaign could raise

\$200,000 for a new total of \$5.5 million. The challenge was met, and a portion of the additional funding was used to complete the Coast Guard Station Education Building, which opened in spring of 2007.

In April 2008, the A.W. Jones Heritage Center opened, having been named in honor of three men, the late A.W. Jones, Sr., his son, the late A.W. Jones, Jr., and his grandson Bill Jones III, three generations who shared a deep commitment to the Society. The 10,000 square foot building included expanded administrative offices, new exhibit space, an event hall for lectures and community occasions, a gift shop, a research library, and vastly improved space for the storage and preservation of the archives and other collections. Volunteers moved thousands of artifacts, as well as collection records, research files, and library books, from the Davis House to the new storage and library spaces. An interactive exhibit about the G8 Summit, featuring White House photographs and rare artifacts, was installed in the new exhibit gallery.



The A.W. Jones Heritage Center opened in 2008.

After years of planning, a long awaited top-to-bottom restoration of the Lighthouse became a reality. In September 2009, the tower light was turned off during a special event dubbed "The Big Turn Off." Restoration according to Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties began, with major Federal funding through the Georgia Department of Transportation. The cast iron windows were repaired, and all interior surfaces painted, including the circular staircase. Support brackets under the gallery at the top of the tower were repaired and in some cases replaced, then painted, and the copper roof cleaned. The exterior of the tower was cleaned and painted in its signature white finish.

On May 17, 2010, "The Big Turn On" celebration marked the completion of the project. This was accompanied by the first event recognizing an upper level membership category, known as "Keepers of the Light." Since 2010, membership in the category has grown from 19 to 153, providing essential support for museum operations and maintenance.

A second volunteer appreciation award was established at the end of 2010 in honor of former Society president Cesar Rodriguez and his wife Janis for their years of dedicated service to the Society. The Rodriguez Award, in the form of a crystal replica of the St. Simons Lighthouse, is given annually and recognizes exemplary acts of stewardship and service performed by a staff member, board member, or individual serving in an official capacity to the Society.

During 2011, Executive Director Sherri Jones and Curator Mimi Rogers completed the self-study required for American Association (later Alliance) of Museums reaccreditation. The extensive process involved preparation of detailed information about all facets of museum operations, culminating in a three-day site inspection by peer reviewers. Reaccreditation in 2012 confirmed the Society's ongoing commitment to professional standards of operation and collections management and is valid until 2026. The Society is one of only fifteen accredited museums in Georgia.

The reaccreditation process not only confirmed the Society's commitment to excellence in museum operations, it highlighted the need to develop diverse business revenues to maintain the new headquarters building and two historic sites. To support these revenue-generating activities and provide the quality educational programming so vital to the Society's mission, staffing increased to six full-time and 12 part-time employees. The Society's operating budget exceeded \$1 million in 2014, placing the Society in the top 20% of accredited museums nationally by size of operating budgets.

Also in 2011, the St. Simons Land Trust approached the Society about assisting with their exciting initiative to acquire the site of Cannon's Point Plantation and create a nature preserve. The Society was asked to form and lead a History Task Force, which would advise the Land Trust on the preservation and interpretation of cultural resources at the Preserve. Since the 1890s, noted archaeologists have conducted excavations at Cannon's Point. Artifacts recovered during these projects were taken to other locations in Georgia, Washington, D.C., or Florida for analysis and storage, never to return. Archaeologist Ray Crook, a task force member and Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the University of West Georgia, suggested that the Society set up an archaeology laboratory in the Coast Guard Station Education Building to curate local finds.

In operation since 2012, the laboratory provides the facilities to clean, analyze, and curate artifacts recovered during ground disturbing activities and approved archaeological projects at Cannon's Point Preserve, as well as other local sites. In 2015, archaeologist Nicholas Honerkamp, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, was appointed Consulting Archaeologist to provide professional oversight for the laboratory. In 2014, the Society began offering expert-led tours of plantation period sites at Cannon's Point during the winter months, highlighting recent archaeological finds from these sites.

During this decade the Society undertook another major restoration project. A \$250,000 grant from the Georgia

Department of Transportation in 2011 launched the muchneeded restoration of the Keeper's Dwelling. A two-year period of research, design, and engineering followed, with the Glynn County Board of Commissioners serving as sponsor for the grant. At the same time, the Society undertook a \$1.3 million capital campaign, under the leadership of Jack Hartman, to provide funding for the restoration, new exhibits, site improvements, and an endowment for future care of the building. A 50-year license for the building was obtained from Glynn County to secure a long-term interest in the Dwelling.

In addition to general repairs and painting, a major goal of the project was to restore or recreate original architectural elements that had changed over time. The modern asphalt shingle roof was replaced by a cedar shingle roof, and original built-in gutters, which had been covered, were revealed and repaired. Deteriorated modern shutters on the first floor were replaced by custom-milled shutters designed to match a circa 1895 photograph of the Dwelling.

To recreate the original appearance of the central hall, where the stairs had been removed around 1915, staircase elements were reconstructed using the 1868 specifications and drawings in the Society's archives. The newel post, handrail, and balusters were constructed in cherry wood, as defined in the original specifications. These replaced painted elements installed when the staircase was rebuilt during the 1974-75 restoration.

Two discoveries were made during the restoration. When the asphalt roofing was removed, an intact wood shingle roof was found. Removal of the wood roofing revealed underlayment paper signed by Cassius Murphy, son-in-law of well-known local African American Neptune Small. Another signature dated the roof to 1908. Inside the Dwelling, early 20th century bead board, scorched by an unrecorded fire, was found behind modern wall board in the former kitchen of the Dwelling.



Executive Director Sherri Jones at Media Day for the Keeper's Dwelling restoration opening on May 13, 2014.

On May 17, 2014, the Keeper's Dwelling reopened, displaying new exhibits on St. Simons Island history and the operation of the Lighthouse, which combined artifacts, historical images, and modern interactives. On the second floor, period rooms interpreting the family life of the keeper at the turn of the 20th century featured iPad interactives. To further enhance the visitor's experience, a modern theater space was constructed in the Heritage Center where a new orientation video could be comfortably viewed. The joint ticket package, which had previously been introduced, now included an "Explorer's Guide" with maps and information, the orientation video in the new Stembler Theater, a tour of the Dwelling, a climb to the top of the Lighthouse, and a stroll of the grounds, as well as a visit to the Maritime Center at the Historic Coast Guard Station.



The restored Keeper's Dwelling opened to the public on May 17, 2014, featuring new exhibits about the Lighthouse and the history of St. Simons Island.

As part of the beautification plan for the Lighthouse grounds, the DeLong Courtyard was built behind the Lighthouse, the gazebo was moved to provide a more spacious lawn area, and the 1890 Oil House was whitewashed to restore its original exterior appearance. Three new outdoor interpretive signs completed the enhancement plan.

Between 2007 and 2012, the Society served as cosponsor with the Friends of Coastal Georgia History and Sea Island Company to erect historical markers recognizing the four largest antebellum cotton plantations on St. Simons Island: Retreat, Hamilton, Cannon's Point, and Hampton. Society member Edwin R. MacKethan III prepared the detailed historical documentation for each marker and oversaw the application process on behalf of the Society. The statewide marker program is administered by the Georgia Historical Society.

In 2015, commitment to education was affirmed by adding a full-time Education Director to develop and manage new educational programs, especially those for school children, and expand and enhance the docent program. This

position has been funded for three years through the generosity of our Board, our members and foundation grants. Buddy Sullivan, whose lecture series "An Overview of Coastal Georgia History" is in its 21<sup>st</sup> year, became the Society's Senior Historian and serves as an advisor on program development and historical research.

Awards during this decade included the 2007 Georgia Governor's Award in the Humanities honoring the Society for building community, character, and citizenship through humanities education over the past 40 years. The Maritime Center at the Historic Coast Guard Station won two awards in 2007: an Award of Excellence from the American Association for State and Local History and an Excellence in Rehabilitation Award from the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation. In 2014, the Keeper's Dwelling project won an Excellence in Restoration Award from the Georgia Trust.

The success of the Society is measured in more than awards garnered. It is reflected in record-breaking admission revenues, the dramatic increase in high-level Keeper of the Light memberships, and capacity attendance at lectures and programs. These achievements represent not only increased financial security for maintaining historic structures and providing educational programs, but also the continued belief in the importance of the Society's work by our members, friends, and visitors, for which we are deeply grateful.

Prepared by Society volunteer Susan Garrett and Curator Mimi Rogers

Information was taken from Coastal Georgia Historical Society Annual Reports, Newsletters, and Histories. Special thanks to Albert Fendig, Ellen Fleming, and Janis Rodriguez for editorial assistance.

#### The Future

Recent strategic planning confirmed that the Board of Directors is committed to taking the organization to the next level in terms of expanding service to the community. The Board has identified new initiatives that reflect the organization's mission and improve its ability to serve our members, the community, and our visitors.

The Society's five-year strategic plan envisions the following:

- (1) Creation of a WWII Museum at the Historic Coast Guard Station with interactive exhibits interpreting the events that took place here during wartime;
- (2) Expansion of the A.W. Jones Heritage Center to include a new exhibit hall that provides a venue for exhibits related to the Society's collections, as well as traveling exhibits, for the benefit of our diverse audiences;
- (3) **More programming for members** including a new winter series, regular oral history presentations, expert-led field trips to historic sites, and changing exhibits;
- (4) And **doubling the number of school children served** by engaging students with hands-on living history and archaeology programs that reveal the fascinating stories of our past. This initiative will include installation of an outdoor classroom at the Archaeology Lab.

## Society Presidents

1965-66	Earl Hargett
1967	A. H. Reu
1968	Clyde C. Smith
1969	Donald Hight
1970-71	Weyman C. Huckabee
1972	John W. Teel
1973	Weyman C. Huckabee
1974	Austin Catts
1975	Gladys G. Fendig
1976	James D. Gould III
1977	E. Baxter Webb
1978-79	Mary G. Burdell
1980	C. Dyson Flanders
1981-82	Mildred B. Frazier
1983-84	Col. Llewellyn Sobke
1985-86	Don E. Carter
1987-88	Samuel O. Franklin
1989	Anne Whelchel
1990	Samuel O. Franklin
1991-92	Albert F. Shelander
1993-94	Charles Spalding
1995-96	Brad Brown
1997-98	Judy Ellington
1999-2000	Ruth D. Kolumber
2001-2002	Gordon Strother
2003-2004	Ellen H. Rogers
2005-2006	Merry T. Tipton
2007-2008	Marie Dodd
2009-2010	Cesar Rodriguez
2011-2012	Jonathan Raclin
2013	Michael Flores/Anne Stembler
2014	Anne Stembler
2015	Hillary Stringfellow
	-

## Society Directors

1975-1987	Anne Shelander Floyd*
1987-2000	Linda O. King
2000-2010	Patricia A. Morris**
2010-present	Sherri Jones

<sup>\*</sup>While Floyd was attending graduate school in 1977, Sandra Norman served as Acting Director.

<sup>\*\*</sup>Title changed to Executive Director in 2000.

## The Cunningham Bowl

Every year, the Coastal Georgia Historical Society awards the Cunningham Bowl to the volunteer who has performed exemplary service to the Society during the previous year. Named for George C. Cunningham, the award was established in 1978.

1978	Everett J. Livesey	2005	Ellen H. Rogers
1979	Henry D. Green	2006	Bea Boglione
1980	Mildred B. Frazier	2007	Cesar Rodriguez
1981	Mary G. Burdell	2008	Merry Tipton
1982	Jeanne M. Holmes	2009	Jo Bryant Crenshaw
1983	Virgie Shreves	2010	Nancy Jenkins
1984	Col. Llewellyn Sobke	2011	Gail Rivard
1985	Heinz A. Lips	2012	Janis Rodriguez
1986	Samuel O. Franklin	2013	Larry H. Bacon
1987	T. Reed Ferguson	2014	Myrna L. Crook
1988	Lois Streett		
1989	Floyd T. Taylor, Jr.		
1990	Dorothy R. Nielson		
1991	Conrad Bostock		
1992	Albert Shelander		
1993	Loraine H. Livesey		
1994	Robert J. Wyllie		
1995	James Bolling Sullivan, Jr.		
1996	Mrs. Allen A. Burns, Sr.		
1997	Mrs. C. Edward Nicholson		
1998	Mrs. Henry Kingdon		
1999	Albert Fendig, Jr.		
2000	Mrs. Thomas Ellington		
2001	Ruth Downey Kolumber		
2002	Irving L. Griffin		
2003	Robert Trau		
2004	Gordon T. Strother		

## The Rodriguez Service Award

Established in 2010, the annual Rodriguez Service Award honors exemplary acts of stewardship and service performed by a staff member, board member, or individual serving in an official capacity to the Coastal Georgia Historical Society.

2010	Janis and Cesar Rodriguez
2011	Sharon Flores
2012	Rawson Gordon
2013	Curt Smith
2014	Sherri Jones and Mimi Rogers

### 2015 Board of Directors

President Hillary Stringfellow
Past President Anne Stembler
Vice President Lewis Glenn
Secretary Kevin Lokey
Treasurer Rusty Bolt
Special Advisor Dave Fox
Endowments Ralph Jernigan

Kay Cantrell Jeanne Manning
Nancy DeLong Mike Martin
Patricia Deveau Cindy Rackley
Ellen Fleming Janis Rodriguez
Susan Hartman Elizabeth Sorrells
Tom Heagy John Tuten
Bill Jones III

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Mary Burdell Don Carter Albert Fendig Albert F. Shelander

## 2015 Staff Members

Executive DirectorSherri JonesCuratorMimi RogersEducation DirectorSandy JensenDevelopment/MembershipSusan Bacon

Coordinator

Public Relations DirectorLeigh Ann Stroud

**Events Coordinator/Store** Curt Smith

Manager

Office Manager Marsha Johnson
Facilities Manager Ray O'Brien
Assistant Store Manager Kathy O'Brien

#### **Museum Store Staff**

Wanda Bernhardt Gail Rivard Carol Cudahy Mark See

Mike Peck Theresa Spangler Sue Rinehart Archie Watkins

**Senior Historian** Buddy Sullivan

Consulting Archaeologist Nick Honerkamp, Ph.D.

## Notes



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