

The Altamaha Echoes

Lower Altamaha Historical Society Newsletter October 1999

The Parish House , St.Andrew's Episcopal Church , Darien, Ga. will be the meeting place for LAHS October and November meetings. The Parish House is located at the corner of Rittenhouse & Green Streets, across from McIntosh Academy. This location is between Fort King George Drive and Highway Ga99. Drive from the Welcome Center on Fort King George Drive to St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church. Turn left on Rittenhouse Street.

LAHS Board of Directors Meeting, October 21, 1999, 4:30 P.M.

The Parish House, St.Andrew's Episcopal Church

LAHS MEETING, OCTOBER 21,1999, 7:00 P.M.–THE PARISH HOUSE,
ST.ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, DARIEN, GEORGIA

HOSPITALITY–Jeanne Klippel, Claudette Moorhouse, Everett Moriarty, Carol Nelson
DUTCH TREAT SUPPER, 5:45 P.M., AT ARCHIE'S

“Fort Stewart Museum–*the progress and processes and future*” will be the program presented by Walter W. Meeks, III, Museum Director/Curator, Fort Stewart Museum, Fort Stewart, Georgia. Included in this presentation will be an over view of the mission of the museum, its de facto role in the Fort Stewart community and a few “sea stories” from Meeks seventeen years as a museum professional

Buck Meeks was raised on the Myrtle Grove Plantation in Bryan County. He was graduated from Armstrong State College. His love of history and culture he attributes to his parents and ancestors in this area. Since 1982 he has worked in museums for both the state and federal government . He was involved in the making of the movies *Glory*, *Ironclads* and *The General's Daughter*.

Buck and his wife Julia and their two young children live in Richmond Hill.

LAHS MEETING, NOVEMBER 18,1999, 7:00 P.M.–THE PARISH HOUSE,
ST.ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, DARIEN, GEORGIA

HOSPITALITY–Martha Carney, Carolyn Hill, Jan Schulte, Genevieve Wynegar
DUTCH TREAT SUPPER, 5:45 P.M., AT ARCHIE'S

“Public School Archeology” will be the program presented by Fred Cook , teacher at McIntosh County Academy. Last spring archaeology was taught for the first time in the McIntosh County School System. High school students from grades 9 through 12 participated in the class. In the first half of the course the students studied the methods of Archaeology and the culture history of McIntosh County. The students then went into the field and excavated two archaeological sites. The students used information from the excavations to answer specific research questions. The results of their work were presented to their classmates and the public in several mobile displays. A video tape of excavations, color slides and several student mobile displays will be used by Fred Cook as he explains this interesting project.

Fred Cook is a life long resident of Coastal Georgia. He holds an M.S. Degree in Archaeology from Florida State University. In addition to teaching he is a part time Contract Archaeologist.

SATURDAY–NOVEMBER 20,1999–
Field Trip

Lower Altamaha Historical Society–

A group Field Trip to tour Historic Savannah is planned for Saturday, November 20. Wormsloe Plantation and the Owens–Thomas House will be included in this tour schedule. Berkley Minor will present the details and a sign up sheet at the October meeting.

LAHS Christmas Covered Dish Dinner Party
Monday Evening, December 13, 7:30 P.M.
Belvedere Island Plantation Club House

Decorated for Christmas, the Belvedere Island Plantation Club House will be the setting for the 1999 LAHS Holiday Celebration. The entree, table set up and drink will be provided. LAHS members and their guests are asked to make reservations and bring a Covered Dish. A sign up sheet for reservations and Covered Dishes will be available at the October and November meetings.

Living on the Georgia Tidewater– On Sunday afternoon, May 2, a large group of coastal historians, community leaders and church members and descendants gathered at the historic Needwood Baptist Church and School on Hwy. 17, in Glynn County, just south of Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation. The reason for the celebration was the dedication of the newly-renovated church and school, and the unveiling of an official Georgia historical marker placed by the Georgia Historical Society and the Pilot Club of Brunswick, Inc.

In the year 2000 a historical marker will be erected in Columbus Square, Darien, Georgia by the Georgia Historical Society and the Lower Altamaha Historical Society. Below is further explanation about these Historical Markers.

Needwood Baptist Church and
Needwood School

Needwood Baptist Church was organized in 1866 on nearby Broadfield Plantation as Broadfield Baptist Church of the Zion Baptist Association. This structure, built in the 1870s, was redesigned in 1885 when the church moved its congregation here. Its formation and history are representative of religious development in the context of plantation rice culture. The nearby one-room Needwood School provided elementary education for this community from 1907 until desegregation in the 1960s. Both structures are examples of early African American vernacular architecture.

Erected by The Georgia Historical Society and the
Pilot Club of Brunswick, Inc.

Columbus Square Railroad Depot

In 1889 the Darien Shortline Railroad was organized to transport yellow pine timber to the Darien sawmills from Georgia's interior. Originating in Tattnall County and continuing through Liberty County, the Darien & Western line was completed in 1895 to its terminus near this spot where a passenger depot was built, now marked by the gazebo. In 1906 the line was bought by the Georgia Coast & Piedmont Railroad, which extended the line 18 miles south to Brunswick in 1914. The train depot was then moved from Columbus Square to the riverfront near the present U.S. Highway 17 bridge. The depot burned in 1971.

Erected by The Georgia Historical Society and the
Lower Altamaha Historical Society

Columbus Square Railroad Depot by Buddy Sullivan

In the years of Reconstruction immediately following the Civil War, Darien became a prominent sawmilling center and shipping port for yellow pine timber and lumber harvested in southeast Georgia. What was remarkable about Darien's sudden burst of prosperity so rapidly was the fact that the town had been burned by the Union forces in 1863, and little remained of the commercial district but ashes when the war ended two years later. However, beginning in late 1865, sawmills began to be rebuilt on the waterfront areas in and around Darien, and on several of the marsh islands east of the town, convenient to deepwater ship anchorages.

Timbermen in the Georgia upcountry in areas with close proximity to the Altamaha River system cut pines and rafted then in log rafts down river to the sawmills at Darien, the only seaport at the mouth of the river with convenient access to the Atlantic Ocean and the intracoastal waterway. The primary areas of timber cutting were along the Ocmulgee, Oconee, Ohoopsee and Altamaha rivers in the Georgia counties of Montgomery, Laurens, Pulaski, Dodge, Telfair, Appling, Wayne, Tattnall, Liberty and McIntosh. Timber rafts were floated down river to Darien where the timber was measured and graded, then sold to local sawmills at Darien, Doboy and St. Simons Island. Sailing vessels, later steamships, came to the Darien vicinity from all over the world, including the northeastern U.S., Mediterranean Sea, British Isles, Scandinavia and South America, to load and ship Georgia timber processed at Darien. The peak of this activity was reached in 1900 when Darien exported 112.5 million linear board feet of yellow pine timber. At this time, Darien was the leading pitch pine timber port on the U.S. Atlantic seaboard and second in the world only to Pensacola, Florida.

As the sources of timber were overcut and moved further away from the Altamaha River system, alternative methods of shipping timber to Darien were sought. This led to the creation of the Darien Shortline Railroad Company in 1889, a consortium of Darien timber brokers and sawmill owners. The railroad was established primarily to facilitate the shipment of pine timber from the Georgia interior (at greater distances from the river systems) to the sawmills at Darien. The Darien Shortline was soon supplanted by another company, the Darien & Western Railroad Company, even before work began on construction of the new line. The railroad, as originally conceived, was to run from Collins in Tattnall County, through Liberty County and into McIntosh County, with a terminus at Darien. Work began in 1890 in Tattnall County and proceeded toward Darien about eighty miles away. In 1895 the Darien & Western reached Darien. A passenger depot and turning facility was constructed in Darien at Columbus Square. Trains began running daily in each direction and, for the first time in its history, the town of Darien had rail service to the interior of Georgia, with connections north to Savannah and south to Jacksonville on the Seaboard Air Line Railway, which had a depot at Darien Junction (later Warsaw). Darien Junction was the point at which the Darien & Western and the Seaboard met, being located about fifteen miles northwest of Darien.

The railroad's arrival in Darien enabled increased shipments of pine timber to be brought in to the local sawmills. In the long run, however, the railroad was unable to save what, by 1905, was a dying timber industry in that area. Columbus Square, meanwhile, became the transportation focal point for the town of Darien which, according to the 1900 census, had a population of about 2,000 persons.

In 1906, the Darien & Western was acquired by the Georgia Coast & Piedmont Railroad Company. The G.C.&P. Retained its Columbus Square depot in Darien and increased the level of passenger and freight service along the line from Darien to Collins, via Eulonia, Darien Junction, Ludowici and Reidsville. In 1910, bonds were sold to fund the extension of the Georgia Coast & Piedmont 18 miles south to a new terminus at Brunswick, to take advantage of the deep-water port facility at that place, as well as what, by then, had become the world's second-leading exporting center (to Savannah) for naval stores products such as turpentine, rosin, roofing shingles and railroad cross ties. The construction of steel bridges and trestlework over the marshes and tidal streams of the Altamaha River delta between Darien and Brunswick was carried out in 1912 and 1913. In the spring of 1914 the Darien-Brunswick rail connection was completed, giving the G.C.&P. A total track system of ninety -nine miles from Collins to the Brunswick River.

In the summer of 1914, the Darien train depot was moved from Columbus Square to the Darien River waterfront on the precise spot where the Darien News building now stands adjacent to the present U.S. Highway 17 concrete bridge. A passenger and automobile transfer service between Darien and Brunswick was begun and for the next five years, local citizens had their first convenient and efficient transportation access to Brunswick, more rapid than the previous method of steamboat travel.

The G.C.&P. Went into receivership in 1919 and rail service to Darien was terminated, never to be revived. Several years later (1925-27) U.S. 17 was built between Darien and Brunswick, part of the new highway traversing the former track bed of the G.C.&P. Railroad over Generals, Butler and Champney islands south of Darien.

Nothing remains of the train depot at Columbus Square. However, close scrutiny of the landscape there clearly shows the approaches of the railroad into Columbus Square. Live oak trees dominate Columbus Square where the depot once stood. The G.C.&P. Depot on the waterfront is also gone, having been destroyed in a fire of questionable origin in 1971, it having been occupied by the Darien News since 1953. The present building was built on the site of the former train