

THE GRIOT

THE SAPELO ISLAND CULTURAL AND REVITALIZATION SOCIETY

Winter 2022

Vol. 2



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New Playground!

The playground across from the library in Hog Hummock will soon have new amenities for children of all ages. This project was made possible through a generous gift from Georgia Power/Southern Company. The Hog Hammock Community Foundation is partnering with McIntosh County and the Department of Natural Resources on this renovation, and SICARS is acting as a fiscal administrator. Initial steps include pouring concrete for the basketball court, which will soon be followed by installation of new playground equipment. The community is looking forward to enjoying this space!

P R E S I D E N T ' S N O T E

Hello Everyone and Happy New Year!

In this new year I'm pleased to share encouraging announcements of growth in our membership and thanks to those who have helped to contribute to SICARS existing and future projects of development. The reorganized SICARS Board of Directors strives to continue in its mission to preserve and revitalize the Hog Hummock Community.

SICARS continues to work on projects around our community, land and structural restoration. SICARS is also making great efforts to bring back the annual Cultural Day which has served in the past to be a vital part of sharing Sapelo's rich Geechee heritage. SICARS committees are also working diligently to keep you updated as to when our events will resume.

Our goal is to continue to provide updates and share information with our community concerning the spread and prevention of COVID 19. We want to protect our community and culture as we value the health and safety of our families here and on the mainland.

In this year and years moving forward, it's important to provide knowledge such as the Heirs Property Workshops, with the goal to help understand the impact, prevention, and proper planning of family property here on Sapelo Island. Please utilize The Griot to gain information concerning the events occurring in the community. SICARS, in conjunction with other local organizations, seeks to reiterate the necessity to preserve and revitalize the rich culture and history of the 44 original descendant families of Sapelo Island.

We call on all descendants, supporters, neighbors, and friends to become SICARS members. Get involved to preserve our most unique and historical resources for the future of the community and our youth. Hog Hummock is the last island-based Geechee Community in America and it is the Pearl of Sapelo Island, McIntosh County, the State of Georgia, and the world. We thank you for your support and encouragement, we can't achieve our goal without YOU.

God Bless and Stay Safe,

Ronald Johnson
President of SICARS

NEW FACES

Lauren Otober interns with SICARS

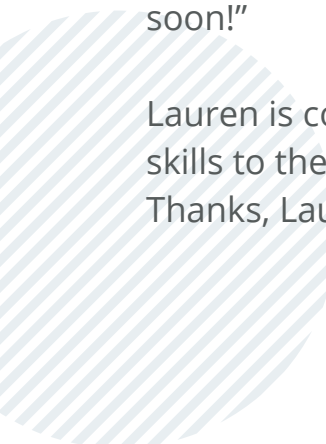
In the summer of 2021, the Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society (SICARS) partnered with the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve (SINERR) to host an intern, Lauren Otober, to help with several projects. Lauren is a senior in high school and a descendant of Sapelo Island.

Lauren says, "This past summer I had the amazing opportunity to complete an internship with Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society to learn more about the culture and to familiarize myself with the island and my family.



Looking back at my time on the Island I reflect on all of the family members I had the pleasure of meeting and talking to and all of the great food and stories that I heard and ate there. Thank you to the wonderful SICARS board for hosting me and a special shout-out to Mr. Jazz. I hope to see you all again really soon!"

Lauren is continuing to help SICARS by lending her considerable graphic design skills to the creation of various outreach materials, including this newsletter. Thanks, Lauren!



Meet Hannah Morris

In 2022, through the Georgia Sea Grant Fellowship Program, SINERR and SICARS will be hosting a Researcher and Project Facilitator, Hannah Morris, to study how flooding from storms, high tides, and periods of heavy rainfall impact the community. Hannah will be working with SINERR, SICARS, and Dean Hardy to map the ditch network and better understand how water is moving through it. This information will be used to help develop strategies to minimize flooding within Hog Hummock. She will also be researching strategies and funding sources to protect vulnerable private homes and structures in the community from flooding.



Hannah will also be working for SICARS on various projects over the next year to help increase the economic and cultural vitality of Hog Hummock. She will be a regular presence in the SICARS Multi-Purpose Center, and she will help prepare for Cultural Day 2022.

Hannah has worked on Sapelo since 2013, studying land-use history and live oak regeneration. She is interested in talking with anyone who has stories, pictures, or knowledge of flooding within Hog Hummock and the ditch system. Are there areas on your property or within the community that routinely flood now during storms or high tides? Have you noticed changes in the ditches (collapses, filling in, water no longer flowing, etc.)? Would you be interested in programs that would help individuals raise their homes or other structures, to help protect them during flooding events? Please stop by the SICARS office anytime to say hello, share your concerns or stories, or reach out to her at 706-266-0124.

NEWS & UPDATES

Pan African Family Empowerment and Land Preservation Network (PAFEN) assists with back taxes

In 2021, the Pan African Family Empowerment and Land Preservation Network (PAFEN) paid \$15,000 in back taxes for Sapelo Island residents and descendants. PAFEN is based in Beaufort, SC and aims to empower people of African descent with the resources to protect their homes and family-owned land from being lost due to tax sales, dishonest land surveys, threat of development, forced sales of heirs property, etc. They also educate community leaders about public and private resources to help families maintain land ownership. Through their financial support back taxes for 15 properties were paid in 2021. PAFEN made these payments directly to the tax commissioner's office.

SICARS would like to thank Maurice Bailey (SICARS Board Member) and Jasper Watts (SICARS Land Retention Committee Chair) for their support of PAFEN's tax support system.

SICARS receives grant from Southern Partners Fund

The Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society (SICARS) received a generous \$40,000 grant from Southern Partners/Project South in Atlanta. These funds were used to install a new heating and cooling system in the SICARS building in Hog Hummock. The previous system was damaged during the last hurricane. This grant will also help support day to day operations in the SICARS building, as we build capacity to work on numerous projects over the upcoming year!

SICARS Board members attend training on fundraising

Several Board members of the Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society (SICARS) attended a training in July of 2021 through the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The training was offered through the Georgia Historic Preservation division in support of the Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network. This network seeks to serve small grassroots organizations and non-profits who are working to preserve and share black history, and promote preservation as a tool for underserved and underrepresented descendant communities. The training focused on fundraising and was led by Robert Bull, the former lead fundraiser for the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Culture Day 2022 planning has begun!

Planning for Culture Day 2022 has begun! Cynthia Hillery will be overseeing the volunteer and planning committees. We are looking forward to gathering together with our community and visitors again.

We will soon be providing more information about the event, how to purchase tickets, and how to register as a vendor. For now, Save the Date of October 22, 2022 and reach out to Cynthia or Hannah if you would like to help!



Juneteenth 2021

Sapelo Island makes history

Sapelo Island made a history by becoming the first community in McIntosh County to recognize and celebrate JUNETEENTH. June 19, 2021 was a day in the community that showed and focused on Unity.

Juneteenth was truly a community effort, from descendants to island residents. It started out as just an idea to do a little something within the community to recognize and display our cultural heritage. In the end it was a great day with food and fellowship.



There were several things that stood out and can't go without saying. First off, hats to all volunteers, who when asked about assisting committed to holding up their part. Thank you, Beverly, Cheryl W., Trice, Cheryl B, Yolanda, Celia, Mike, Ceasar, Ed, Charissa. Thank you to HHCF members Joel Hillery and Richard Banks for permission for use of the grounds and their work to prepare prior to the event. In addition, THANK YOU to all island residents in attendance and who assisted in all other ways, including donations. Lastly, one very special part to the day was to see the representation of so many descendant families: the Grovners, Gardners, Walker, Johnson, Jones, Banks, Williams, Hillerys, Holmes. Truly, it was a day of celebration, with Sapelo making history and having a vital impact by showing what a community can do when we focus on working together.

The gratitude and appreciation to ALL cannot be said enough. The volunteers and work of so many made this event a success. The event no doubt sparked and showed how much "WE" CAN, when others say we can't.



Hog Hammock Foundation and SICARS host community meetings on county zoning changes

Thank you for participating in the December 13 discussion about zoning in the Hog Hummock community. Archie Davis has confirmed that the County continues to move forward with county-wide zoning updates, but the process is slower than anticipated. He also said that, to date, no changes to the Hog Hummock community are being prepared. He did, however, confirm that community members are welcome to present ideas to the County Commission at any time and advocate for their adoption by the Commission.

A recording of the meeting is available to be viewed at <https://sicars.org/media/>. The website also includes links to other sessions that have been held regarding zoning, planning, and permitting. If you have trouble watching these, do not hesitate to email SICARS for assistance.


We are continuing to partner with One Hundred Miles to collect community input and research regarding local zoning. As a next step in evaluating zoning updates for Hogg Hummock, SICARS and the Hog Hammock Community Foundation are developing a survey to capture ideas and feedback from property owners and descendants. The survey will be organized around the recommendations shared in the Working Draft Report and will give you a chance to offer feedback that we were not able to capture on Dec. 13. These surveys will be made available online and will be mailed through the US Postal Service. We will host another meeting to discuss the zoning update this spring. Zoom options will be available.

The Gullah Geechee Legal Defense Fund

The Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society (SICARS) received a \$50,000 grant from the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund in 2021 to support the Gullah Geechee Legal Defense Fund. This fund will assist Gullah Geechee property owners with retaining land ownership and fighting forced sales and from rising taxes and speculative developers, which have long been a threat to descendant owned land and cultural heritage on Sapelo.

The Action Fund is a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and funded 5 projects in Georgia. SICARS has used the grant to develop a partnership with the Georgia Heirs Property Law Center. So far, they have held three workshops, which have focused on heirs property law, estate planning, and heirs property interest. These workshops will be made available on SICARS's website soon, so people who could not attend can view the webinars.

Heirs property refers to a home or land that passes from generation to generation without a legally designated owner, which results in ownership being divided among all living descendants in a family. This form of ownership can create conflict and can limit a family's ability to build generational wealth. The first workshop focused on an introduction to heirs property - what heirs property is and the implications for families and land retention. The second workshop focused on how to prevent heirs property through estate planning, and the third workshop explored how property interests are determined in heirs property ownership. Thanks to Jazz Watts, the SICARS Land Retention Committee, and the Georgia Heirs Property Law Center for making these workshops happen.



M E R I D I A N D O C K

The Department of Natural Resources expects to begin the complete renovation of the Meridian Dock imminently. The contractors will have a week or so to mobilize and stage equipment, etc. Traffic patterns at the Meridian Dock are going to be significantly altered as demolition begins and heavy equipment is moved about the site. There will be ample parking in the gravel overflow lot and around the Visitors Center, but many of the spaces along the causeway will be taken up by construction equipment. DNR will make provisions for moving gear, supplies and any passengers with mobility concerns from a staging area down to the ferry. Signage is being created to help guide passengers along the route. Fishing and non-ferry passenger vehicle traffic will stop once construction begins. The project includes complete replacement of the docks, bulkhead and resurfacing the loading/unloading area. The project should be complete by October 2022. Please contact DNR if you have any questions or concerns about these renovations.


Trip Durant was recently hired as a new captain aboard the Sapelo Island ferry system. He is a native of McIntosh County and enjoys fishing and hunting the local waterways. Trip has been a captain with TowBoat US, the University of Georgia, and at times has piloted the Capt. Gabby on the waters around Sapelo Island.



H O G H U M M O C K C O M M U N I T Y

FAITH MATTERS

**First African Baptist Church
St. Luke Baptist Church**



Philippians 4:12 *I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.*

As we enter yet another season with COVID 19 continuing to affect our families and communities, we hold strong to our beliefs and fellowship in uncertain times. We ask that you keep our church families in your prayers. GOD Bless and Keep us ALL.

St. Luke Baptist audio services
Wed nights 7pm & every 2nd & 4th Sunday morning @
11am

Wed Bible Study (605) 313-6417
Sunday service (425) 436 6317 code 312 5791

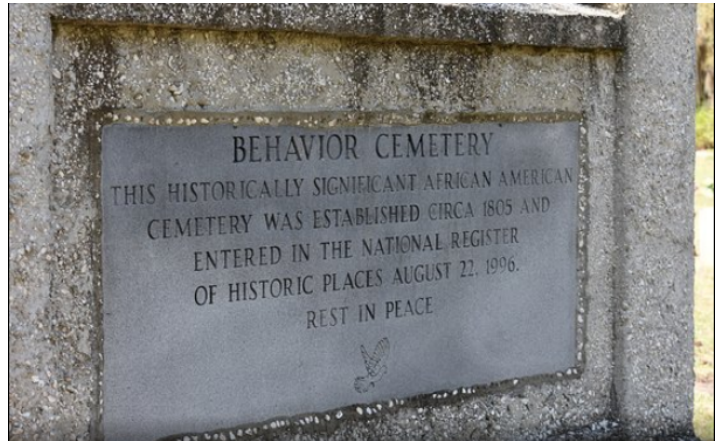


Behavior Cemetery Clean-up Saturday, March 26th, 2022

Over the years this Historical Cemetery has been the final resting place for descendants near and far. It takes the willing hands, hard work and volunteer work all to maintain the cemetery.

We are thankful for the past years men and women, who put forth the effort and took time out to do their part, such committed grass cutters like Dea. William Banks and Dea. Tracy Walker and currently Mike Grovner Sr, Marvin Grovner Sr, Lewis Jackson & Joel Hillery. Thank you to Allen Bailey, Richard Banks, and Larry Johnson.

We will have a clean-up of the cemetery on Saturday, March 26th, 2022. Please come out and help us keep the cemetery neat and tidy!



Watchnight 2021 on Sapelo

I would like to say Thanks to all who came out to Church on 12/31/2021. The attendance and the joy of seeing each other was refreshing. All whom I spoke with or made contact with and then some, I thank you for coming out with me, to pray and bring in the New Year at First African Baptist Church on Sapelo Island.

Thank you,
Karen Grovner-Hillery

WATER BILL DUE

Payments due January 2022
\$52

Please mail payments to:
Hog Hammock Community
Foundation
P O Box 56
Sapelo Island, GA 31327

All Island descendants and/or
land owners with a water line

PLEASE DO YOUR PART

SICARS MEMBERSHIP DUES

Please remember to renew
your SICARS membership
\$25

Dues can be paid through cash,
check, or online
www.sicars.org

Checks can be mailed to
SICARS
P.O. Box 6
Sapelo Island, Georgia 31327

**The next *Griot* newsletter will be in April 2022.
Please send in any articles you want included by
April 1st, 2022. Thank you!**



Sapelo Island Black History Community Celebration

Saturday, February 26th, 2022

10:00 am - 4:00 pm

Everyone is welcome to join for a celebration and recognition of Unity in OUR community on Saturday, February 26th at the SICARS Multi-purpose Center. Sapelo descendants will fire up the pits and be selling lunches on location, and there will be other items on display and for sale.

This is also a chance to renew your SICARS Membership for 2022!



Anyone wishing to volunteer to assist with the event can contact Karen (912) 270-3154 or the SICARS office at (912) 485-2197.

Special Thank You to...

Melissa Jest of Department of Community Affairs for her assistance in the fundraising training
Skipper StipeMaas & Delene Porter of the Georgia Heirs Property Law Center
Megan Desrosiers & Alice Keyes of One Hundred Miles
Sherry Suttles of GGG, Inc.
Theresa White of PAFEN
Professor Dean Hardy of USC.
Ms. Sherry Suttles, for her \$5,000 donation to SICARS.

Please join us in praying for

Sis. Winnie Wilson
Dea. William "Doc" Banks
Dea. Benjamin Hall
Sis. Renée Hay

