

CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MEETING

**REGULAR MEETING
110 EAST STATE STREET**

ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM

OCTOBER 4, 2006

2:00 P.M.

MINUTES

CCHPC Members Present:

**Daves Rossell, Chairman
Alexander Luten, Vice-Chairman
George Cohen
Vaughnette Goode-Walker
William Haynes
Stephen T. Lindell
Pamela G. Lossing
Christian Sottile
Lisa L. White**

CCHPC/MPC Staff Members Present:

**Ellen Harris, Historic Preservation Planner
Janine N. Person, Administrative Assistant**

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m.

II. WELCOME

Mr. Rossell welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked the Commission and Staff members to introduce themselves.

III. INTRODUCTIONS

Ms. Harris introduced the guest speaker, Mr. Daniel T. Elliott, an archeologist and President of the LAMAR Institute, Inc., to speak about archeology in Chatham County.

Mr. Elliott said the LAMAR Institute is a non-profit organization for archeological and historical research and public education about archeology and history, primarily in the southeast, but they have worked in Nova Scotia, the Bahamas, Bermuda, and other places. He is originally from the Atlanta area, but now lives in Rincon.

He said some of the threats to Chatham County's past include looting for the antiquities market; residential and industrial development; major landscape alterations, particularly golf courses that use lots of real estate and massively alter the original landforms; and benign neglect. The looting for the antiquities market is big in the Savannah area. He has worked with a lot of collectors and various people in order to try to bridge the divides. Many of the relics found in Savannah have a lot of money value, and are quickly gone from Chatham County. Unless they are documented, they just disappear from history. Savannah has not had a permanent archeologist. There has been an archeologist at Armstrong Atlantic State University (AASU) and there is one now at Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD), but there has not been a permanent presence of archeology in the Savannah area.

The first project he did in Savannah was the 1978 Truman Parkway. Eleven years he returned and completed "The Lost City Survey". This initiative was an outgrowth of their work at New Ebenezer in Effingham County. They took old maps of the region and looked at all of the lost towns to see if they were there on the modern day landscape. The survey included several lost settlements within Chatham County such as Hampstead, High Gate, and Vernonburg. Places not included at that time were Thunderbolt and the Villages on Skidaway Island. He included Savannah because even though Savannah has paid a lot of attention to its history and its historical structures, it really has not spent much effort on its archeology. There has been a fair amount of archeology done on Skidaway Island, although most of The Landings development happened without any archeology. Out of the thousands of acres developed there, only a hundred acres were looked at. He recently completed a project at Tybee Island beneath the lighthouse keeper's house, and found wonderful Civil War deposits from the Union Army's occupying force that attacked Fort Pulaski. There were 10,000 troops that landed at Tybee to attack Fort Pulaski, and they spent several months getting ready for the battle. There were a lot of tin cans, trash, bones, and other things at the lighthouse area from that engagement. The Beaulieu plantation near Burnside Island was where the French landed in the Revolutionary War to attack Savannah. There was also a Civil War Confederate battery there where he recently did some work for one of the landowners. Cherokee Hill is the highest point in Chatham County, and one of the best properties in the area that the Commission may have control. There was one called Bilbow Mound near Tybee, which was a shell mound from about 4,000 years ago. It was excavated in the 1950's, and was in remarkably intact condition. There are thousands of Aboriginal Native American sites in Chatham County. Right now, the count of archeology sites in the county is a little over 1,000, but it is just the tip of the iceberg. In addition, there are thousands of earlier settlers' house sites covering the period from the 1730's on up. There are important Revolutionary and Civil War sites, and even a few Spanish American War era fortification sites.

A quick overview of archeology in Chatham County: around the 1840's people started discovering the Pleistocene fossils, extinct animal bones, in the Skidaway Narrows area. There was a book written on the subject by one of the major geologist in the world at that time, Charles Lyell. In the 1860's, a former mayor, Charles C. Jones, Jr., also an archeologist, a historian, and a Confederate Colonel, began working in the area, writing, and making collections in the Savannah area. In the 1890's, a wealthy Northerner, Clarence Bloomfield Moore and his men excavated many archeological sites. It was rough archeology, crude by modern standards, but for the period, his items were very good. He had a medical illustrator with him and they did nice drawings; much was documented and published. The 1920's was the start of a modern interest in archeology led by many influential Savannahians. An archeologist named Vladimir Fewkes came to the area to work on the Irene Mound, which is under the Ports Authority at mouth of Pipemaker's Creek. There were dozens of other additional excavations in the 1930's by WPA crews under several professional archeologists. Most of those were never written up because of World War II. The items were just boxed away and sat on shelves. In the 1990's, some of the material was analyzed and written up.

In the 1970's, surveys were started of some of the coastal islands around here. Easy sites were identified, but it missed many of the subtle sites that we now know how to find. During the 1980's to the present, there have been Cultural Resource Management or CRM projects. Any project involving federal funding includes an archeological component. As a result, there are a number of archeological projects that have been done in Chatham County. They are disconnected and have not been pulled together by anyone, nor has anyone made sense of it all because they happen as an area is wiped out. There is archeological activity going on at Sapelo Island, St. Catherine's Island, and Ossabaw Island. There is the Golden Isles Initiative,

which is trying to draw attention and get cohesion among the studies. There are internet links with dozens of site reports.

They are using new techniques, including ground penetrating radar map pictures and applying them to Chatham County. Many other new techniques are now being utilized, like analyzing bones to learn about food, and analyzing a grain of sand to get a date with a technique that was not available five years ago.

Abercorn, where the water treatment plant is at the mouth of Abercorn Creek, was another early settlement. Unlike Savannah, all of the town lots there were wedge-shaped, like a pie, because they all wanted water access so everyone's property came to a point. The same wedge-shaped pattern was also seen on the New Village of Skidaway Island in the 1750's. It is currently woodlands. In the Revolutionary War, the British built a fort there, and a drawing of the fort was found in 1989. Cherokee Hill had a major Revolutionary War fort and camp on it, as well as Civil War encampments. It may not look the same two years from now because it may have a distribution center built on top of it. The Little Neck area had a radar survey done earlier this year by one of the descendents of the cemetery. They mapped and took photographs of all the graves to document the graveyard. This is a good example of what can be done in rural cemeteries. In this case, there were graves inside and outside of the fence. Thunderbolt has a lot of military history dating back to the 1730's, and as it was a very important place on the coast, Oglethorpe had a fort built that was heavily fortified during the Civil War by the Confederates. There was the original lighthouse at Tybee that they are not sure where it was located, and there were Revolutionary War, Civil War, and Spanish-American War forts at Tybee. There was a village at Tybee where a few artifacts were found while excavating under the assistant light keeper's house. There were many military relics from the Civil War, including a plate from about the 1750's. There is some evidence of earlier occupation there as well. Vernonburg was on the list of lost cities, and they are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. German and Swiss indentured servants who had finished serving their tenure settled the original town of Vernonburg. As a Christmas present they were given a town lot in the new town of Vernonburg. Like earlier colonial settlements, they were given little 60 by 90-foot town lots, two acre garden lots, and then 38, 48, or 50 acre farms. It was a three-tiered pattern similar to Savannah, Ebenezer, and other settlements where there was the little town lot, a garden lot, and a big farm lot. For the archeology project, they focused on looking for the early 1742 town. The current settlement known as Vernonburg is offset a little bit from the original colonial town. Most of Vernonburg fronts the river today, or Dancy Avenue, but the original town was along Rockwell Avenue.

Downtown Savannah was listed as a National Landmark in the 1970's, and there have been attempts to get it recognized as a World Heritage Site. Archeologically, there has not been a lot done in Savannah, but there are many good historical records and many maps. One example in town that relates to the outlying farming areas of the original colonial town is at the end of Waldburg Street at the Hope VI Development Project. They did archeology there several years ago and found a number of interesting things including a colonial house probably built for Joseph Cooper, an anonymous colonist, who lived on farm Lot Number 3, Jekyll Tything, Darby Ward. This is just one example of one particular house, and there are hundreds of other potential examples out there. That was the first one that anybody has ever found of all of the outlying farms. In addition to the house site, they found some traces from the British Artillery from the 1778 Siege. There is a lot of evidence of the Confederate interior line; a heavily fortified line just outside of town that was built in the early 1860's. They also found the house site of Abram Harmon. (Harmon Street was named for him.) Mr. Elliott showed a bottle nipple from a nursing bottle from one of Mr. Harmon's children. They were called murder bottles because they would get bacteria in the little nozzle, and children would die from drinking out of

the bottles. He tried to figure out which child had left the teeth marks on it, and narrowed it to one of two children. Mr. Harmon died in 1858; two years later, and his wife was listed in the census as a “lady of leisure.”

Another big topic in this area is military history, with seven or eight wars to pick from, including King George's war, the Seven Years War, and the War of 1812. The Civil War is better known, and many of the relic collectors in Savannah are experts. The Revolutionary War is another great topic, not just the Battle of Savannah, but other events that took place in Chatham and adjacent counties. Mr. Elliott said last year his wife found the part of the fortification from the 1779 Siege at Battlefield Park, and many archeologists have looked for it over the past 30 years and had given up on it. Benson Lossing, a historian, wrote about the history of the Revolution and the War of 1812, and described the fortifications that the French built on the east side of town still visible in the 1850's. It is possible there are other parts of the trenches from the attack and from the British defenses that may be intact and could be relocated. Now that they have found a little piece of it, maps could be stretched to fit so that they could see where to go find other sites. The area is crawling with Civil War fortifications. Most of the Confederate fortifications were built and then abandoned when they realized they could not defend them all. When they were expecting an attack from the ocean, the attack came from the interior, and they had to shift everything quickly to the west side of town. They took all of the cannons, quickly dug trenches, and moved them over to the west side where most of the battles took place. The trenches on the west side of town are areas almost unknown archeologically. There was Sherman's Field Order 15, which gave 40-acres and a mule to the freed slaves that was later rescinded by Congress and President Andrew Johnson. It lasted long enough to have left an archeological trace. There were plenty of freed blacks that settled on Ossabaw, Saint Catherine's, and Sapelo that are important parts of American history, and they can find traces of those sites. The Civil War defenses, particularly on the west side of town but also on the east, have an interior line that runs from Fort Bozz in the middle of the country, to Fort Brown in the Catholic Cemetery off Wheaton Street and Skidaway Road, and Fort Mercer. These are all connected by a whole series of artillery and that ran for several miles; most of which have not had any archeology.

Another important topic is the African-American history where the best example is Hermitage Plantation that was destroyed by the Union Camp plant in Garden City. At least one slave quarters was taken up to Michigan to the Henry Ford Museum. It was also the birthplace of Savannah Gray bricks, which started being produced around 1810 on this particular plantation. Most activity lately has been out on Ossabaw where they are looking at a series of tabby slave quarters from the John Morel plantation. It is an active archeological, historical, architectural, and cultural project where they are trying to explain what life was like on the plantation for the slaves, landowners, freed blacks, and the later servants of the people that owned the island. It is a rich history that tells many stories.

Archeologists feel the greatest need for Chatham County is inventory; there are still plenty of sites to be located. They do it piecemeal, little projects of a few hundred acres at a time. No one has really applied himself or herself to the entire county. Many places create archeological greenspaces because they are appealing and kill two birds with one stone. They want to create more awareness of the fact that there are objects under the ground. Archeological sites are non-renewable resources; they are not like whales and bald eagles, you cannot grow another one. Once you destroy these archeological sites, they are gone.

Mr. Rossell thanked Mr. Elliott and Ms. Harris for initiating the idea of having educational talks as part of the meetings. He said the Commission has some down time before applications

come in from unincorporated areas. Therefore, we are using the slack time to educate ourselves. The informative talks help the Commission to know what potential there is.

Mr. Lindell asked about the World Heritage nomination.

Ms. Harris stated it was a project initiated a number of years ago and was dropped when it was determined that all of the property owners within the designated area would have to agree to it. Now, her understanding is that the rules have changed a little bit, and there may be a way where all of the property owners do not necessarily have consent. They are moving forward with that with a large committee of people who have been working on it.

Mr. Lindell asked who the issuing authorities were. He asked if it would be the United Nations.

Ms. Harris stated it is UNESCO.

Mr. Luten asked if there is more information on the Savannah Gray brick.

Mr. Elliott stated it was made at the McGowton Plantation, which is the Hermitage Plantation, and is now under the International Paper plant in Garden City. Many of the plantations made their own bricks.

Mr. Haynes asked if the scope of the work on Ossabaw Island was limited to the slave quarters or if it would be broader.

Mr. Elliott stated archeology on Ossabaw Island dates to the 1960's and 1970's looking at mostly Indian sites. Currently, with funding from a National Park Service grant they are restoring the buildings, focusing on the tabby slave house dwellings. They have some great documents from the other parts of the island where slave owners kept diaries of their expenditures.

Mr. Haynes said there was a connection with the Morel's down near the Shipyard area. There was some special paint or colors being manufactured over on Ossabaw Island -- some berries were found there that they made the paint from.

Mr. Sottile asked where the Bilbow Mound is presently if you are heading out President Street.

Mr. Elliott stated as you go down the hill at Fort Wayne and go around the corner toward Truman Parkway, he thought it was on this side of the Truman Parkway on the left. He thought the Department of Transportation might own it.

Ms. Harris asked what happened to the Irene Mound.

Mr. Elliott said it was under asphalt. It was completely excavated and a report is available from the University of Georgia that was done for the National Parks Service.

Ms. Lossing asked about the Laurel Grove Cemetery, and if he had done any studies out there.

Mr. Elliott answered no. He mostly deals with unmarked family cemeteries. There have been several studies done in the Colonial Cemetery that are published of detailed survey work there.

Ms. Goode-Walker stated she was curious about the integration of archeology in Savannah tourism, and asked if any steps were made toward it.

Mr. Elliott said they had talked about it amongst themselves as professionals, and it is all part of a broader problem of getting their message out.

Ms. Goode-Walker said she was asking because at the Owens-Thomas house, they did an archeological dig in 1993, and some of the artifacts are on display now, along with lots of written material about it.

Mr. Elliott stated all of these things take money to develop. He said there are plenty of archeologists in Georgia that could help do interpretative studies or whatever you would want to do to help get the message out to the average person. They would like to make their knowledge available.

Ms. Rita Elliott stated there is a lot that could be done with it, but nothing is ever done. If you do a dig, so many people come up because they are so interested and ask questions. It is a natural magnet for tourism, and it has not been taken advantage of in Savannah or the surrounding areas.

Mr. Elliott stated that right now they are still gathering the baseline data of locating sites before development destroys them. Archeology is an opportunity to see what the buildings looked like in the Colonial period, and what kind of trash or objects the people had.

Mr. Lindell said the Ramada, which is now the Marriott, was built on top of a dwellings shipyard where the Iron Clad Georgia was made. He asked if some of that site was available that has not been covered up yet, and what did they actually get from that dig.

Mr. Elliott stated he did not work on that one, but saw a report on the Willow Link facility.

Mr. Elliott stated they do not do that much work in Savannah. They worked on projects like the Federal building, the Juliette Low building in the early 1980's, the Marriott on Liberty Street, and the parking garage next door to it. They did some digs back during the Olympics on the medians on Oglethorpe Avenue. There have not been that many digs in town and they do not really know what is left. In the places where he has dug in downtown, things go down deep, but when you dig a 30- or 40-foot foundation hole for some of the larger hotels; it annihilates anything that would have been under that area. There are still some parts of the original Colonial town and the riverfront that probably have potential. When they put in the Vietnam Memorial at Emmett Park, it was a good area with a lot of potential that had not been disturbed. There are areas in the original Colonial town that probably exist, but at the rate they are being built on with the larger buildings, he did not know how much were left.

Mr. Lindell asked was there anything that needed to be excavated east of the river from where the Marriott is now and is slated to be developed soon.

Mr. Elliott said there are likely outlying farmsteads.

Mr. Lindell stated that on the west side of town there might be some Civil War battle sites that are more or less underdeveloped at this point.

Mr. Elliott said just beyond the Roundhouse and in the areas to the west, there are miles of Confederate trenches. Some had battles associated with them and some did not. There were also Revolutionary War camps in that area. That would be a top priority important area because it is undocumented archeologically.

Mr. Lindell asked if there was any work done along the Ogeechee Canal.

Mr. Elliott stated he has not worked in that area. He said the Salt Creek area was heavily fortified.

Mr. Rossell thanked Mr. Elliott, said the presentation was informative, and there was a lot of potential there. He said the Commission would like to support him and, hopefully, Mr. Elliott would help support the Commission by making places aware or known to them that could be of interest. He stated there has been some discussion of a need on the Commission of having an archeological specialist as a component of the Commission.

IV. UPDATES

A. Savannah Ogeechee Canal

Ms. Harris gave an update on the last presentation by Dr. Finlay who spoke about the Savannah Ogeechee Canal, which generated a lot of interest. She said she made contact with Dr. Newell who is doing the archeology work that Dr. Finlay had spoken to the Commission about, and he was very excited to hear that the Commission was interested in the organization and their plans. She also made contact with Dr. Bob Hughes who is the Director of the Savannah Ogeechee Canal Society. She read an excerpt from an email that Dr. Finlay sent to her subsequent to his coming to speak to the Commission.

Dr. Finlay wrote:

“It's now quite clear to me that the Savannah Ogeechee Canal Society and the MPC/HPC can work together in many ways. We have master planning documents on hand, and I have a few new ideas on how we can proceed. I will bring up some of this at the Canal Society's board meeting tomorrow, and I'll look forward to working with you in the future.

Finally, thanks again for the chance to tell the canal's history before the Historic Planning Commission. It was pleasure to meet you and members of the commission.”

Ms. Harris stated she was trying to get Dr. Hughes or Dr. Newell to be the guest speaker at the November meeting. They assured her that one or both of them would be able to be here, present what their plans are, and answer specific questions. She stated she printed out and placed at each Commissioner's seat the archeological component from their website where they post updates.

Mr. Rossell stated that Dr. Finlay went from their last meeting up to the World Canal Conference in Pennsylvania. He met a number of individuals who were working with canals similar to ours, and they were dealing with similar issues of preservation and how to help the canal become a recognized, cultural asset.

Mr. Cohen asked if it is under the jurisdiction of the City, and wondered what cooperation the City would be willing to give.

Ms. Harris said that as far as she could tell from doing her research that it is owned by the City, they have afforded the County some jurisdiction, and she was looking into the implications of that.

B. Contact with Communities/Individuals Interested in District or Property Nominations

Ms. Harris gave the update on the outreach to the various communities and the status of applications. She spoke with the Pinpoint Neighborhood Association on September 25, and she thought they had a really good meeting. Mr. Haynes was present, it was very positive, and they had good questions. She thought they had more internal discussions to do and decisions to make. She told them that she would make herself available as much as they need her in terms of preparing the application, or just answering questions with concerns that they have.

She mentioned at the last meeting that Bloomingdale was interested in the historic resources on the outskirts of the City, not technically within the City. She said Bloomingdale City Council was still discussing that, and there might be some jurisdictional issues they are still thinking about. She was waiting to hear from them.

She understood that Sandfly appeared to be ready to move forward, and she would be contacting their neighborhood association president to find out what is the status of their application.

Montgomery and Beaulieu have expressed interest, and she is going to be working with them and talking with them some more about their status.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS

V. MINUTES – Approval of Minutes – September 6, 2006

CCHPC ACTION: Mr. Lindell made a motion that the Chatham County Historic Preservation Commission approve the minutes as presented. Mr. Luten seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Rossell announced that the next meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 1, 2006, at 2:00 P.M. in the Arthur A. Mendonsa Hearing Room.

There being no further business to come before the Chatham County Historic Preservation Commission the meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris,
Preservation Planner

EH/jnp