

CHATHAM COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

**REGULAR MEETING
110 EAST STATE STREET**

ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM

October 1, 2008

2:00 P.M.

MINUTES

CCHPC Members Present:

**Daves Rossell, Chairman
George Cohen, Vice-Chairman
Jane A. Feiler
William Haynes
Stephen T. Lindell
Pamela G. Lossing
Christian Sottile
Lisa L. White**

CCHPC Members Not Present:

Vaughnette Goode-Walker

CCHPC/MPC Staff Members Present:

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

I. WELCOME

The meeting was called to order at 2:05 p.m.

II. INTRODUCTIONS

Dr. Rossell asked Board and Staff members to introduce themselves. He introduced Professor Jong Hyun Lim who introduced his Historic Preservation class from the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD).

III. GUEST SPEAKER: Patricia Deveau, A History of Sandfly

Ms. Harris introduced Ms. Deveau, a historian and consultant from Atlanta that has been working with Sandfly for the last five years. She said that Ms. Deveau is preparing the National Register nomination for Sandfly as well as the Chatham County local register nomination.

Ms. Deveau stated that she has been compiling the wonderful stories and looking for documents and information about Sandfly. She said that she thought it would be a three month project but they are now in their fifth year. She thanked the families for the opportunity to work with them and for telling their story.

She stated that on February 1, 1733, Noble Jones, his wife, their two children, and two house servants arrived in Georgia aboard the Anne with General Oglethorpe to establish the colony of Georgia. Mr. Jones was a surveyor, ranger, captain of a marine scout boat, draftsman, builder, and an Indian agent who was also a self-taught doctor. He was granted 500 acres of land on the Isle of Hope for protecting the colony and to establish a plantation, Wormsloe, that would continue in his family to present day. The tabby house at Wormsloe is part of the Georgia State Historic Site, the family's big house, library, and former slave cabins are still owned by the descendants. Slavery was forbidden but many of the colonists borrowed and rented slaves from nearby South Carolina and they did not know whether Mr. Jones owned or borrowed his first slaves.

She displayed several maps that were used to document the history of Sandfly and to give some background. She also showed a petition from 1750 where Mr. Jones claimed that he had possessed no lands in the colony of Georgia except for the tract on the Isle of Hope which was held by lease. There were seven Negroes who worked there and unless the Board of Trustees would grant Mr. Jones more land he would have to dispose of the slaves or keep them employed where they were. The Board of Trustees approved it and later slavery was legalized in Georgia. The people who live at Sandfly are descendants of slaves who were owned by the Jones, DeRenne, Barrow family who lived and worked at Wormsloe after they were free.

In 1849, the Jones estate was settled and Wimberley inherited it. He kept approximately 150 slaves that were a part of Mr. Jones estate. Mr. Jones abandoned his plantation Poplar Grove, which was located near Victory Drive and DeRenne Avenue because it was too close to town and moved the slaves out to Wormsloe. In 1861 his slaves included all those brought from Poplar Grove, Wormsloe, and those that came from El Destino Plantation in Tallahassee, Florida. The list of slaves includes the ancestors of the Lutten family and some others.

Mr. Jones' journal talks about the antebellum time when he built Negro and servant houses, put under pinnings in the houses, and in 1856 while anticipating the influx of slaves from Florida he had four double Negro houses built. He listed the cost to transport Mary, his wife's Negro to Georgia, which was \$198.10 and included transportation. He also bought blankets, clothes, shoes, hats, buckets, tubs, sieves, pots, ciphers, kettles, cups, pans, and scissors. Two years later he added 14 glass windows to the Negro houses and purchased two pairs of locks and hinges for the homes. Mr. Jones knew his slaves by names, provided and gave them items, and gave prizes for the cleanest homes like chairs, tables, bedsteads, looking glasses, plate shawls, calico dresses, and coverlets. Ms. Deveau wondered if any of those items have been handed down to Sandfly and may still be in the Sandfly family.

She spoke about Wormsloe being a modest factory plantation where they grew cotton, had livestock, and provided a small amount of food. The slaves had knowledge of the area and were familiar with the plantation, lands, water, and nearby forest, and their knowledge of the environment made a small profit. They also raised small crops of corn, sweet potatoes, seeds, sugar cane, peppers, okra, and ground nuts around their cabin, in the ponds, and in undeveloped portions of the plantation. They kept a variety of barnyard fowl and ran cattle and hogs.

She said that Shell Road eventually became Skidaway Road and the route for the streetcars. They do not know what happened to the Wormsloe slaves during the Civil War conflict. There is no record that the Jones family took their slaves into the interior of Georgia like most did because he was still farming

400 acres producing corn, peas, and hay. During this time period there was jubilation of freedom and the horror of the Yankees stealing things.

The Jones family was able to hold onto Wormsloe after the war. They left the country for a while, and Mr. Jones changed his name to DeRenne. When Mr. DeRenne came back in the 1870's he started making improvements using his former slaves to help. In 1870 the Chatham County census was not as specific as later ones which say Sandfly. The names of former Wormsloe slaves who are Sandfly ancestors appear in groupings like Miller, Frazier, Harris, Price, Bowen, Brown, Grant, Hazard, Beach, Butler, and other names. Two households next to each other included Wormsloe slaves; Thomas and Harriet Anderson, Chaney Owens an ancestor of the Luten family, Brutus Butler, Thomas Luden, Matilda, William, Benjamin, and Mary. It is important because it shows that the area around them was familiar, and they decided to stay in the area even after freedom.

She said that from the viewpoint of a landscape architect or builder, the area near Wormsloe had everything going for it like the high ground, clear artesian wells, good sandy soil, and proximity to woods, rivers, creeks, marshes, and that they could take the Shell Road into Savannah or to the Isle of Hope.

Less than four years after the end of the Civil War, Savannah and its outlying areas were connected by streetcars. By 1903 Savannah had one of the most modern and thoroughly equipped electric streetcar railroad systems in the south where 54 miles of track connected all sections of the city from downtown to the suburbs, to resorts on the Isle of Hope, and to communities on Vernonburg, Beaulie, Montgomery, Pin Point, and Thunderbolt through an area called Sandfly. The name Sandfly originated from the tiny biting insects that plagued the coastal areas, or, another theory is that it might have come from a song sung by Negro boatmen who rolled through the coastal areas.

She spoke about how land was bought and sold by the descendents of the slaves of Wormsloe. She said that Mr. Edward J. Thomas sold lots to freed blacks such as Chaney Luten, Thomas Kemp, Mingo Jenkins, Samuel Bowen, Collins Days, Lucinda Mitchell-Collins, and others who were former slaves who had worked at Wormsloe. He also sold land to Cubis Frazier, who was believed to be a free black carpenter who built Negro houses, and the cotton mill trunk and gate at Wormsloe in the 1850's. Most of the sold land bordered the streetcar railroad lines that ran down Central Avenue, Skidaway Road (the old Shell Road), Ferguson and Norwood Avenues, and Montgomery Crossroads. She said that the residents paid \$1, \$25, \$40, or \$100 for Kemp's six acres and that the deeds revealed an arrangement for former slaves to receive land. She talked about different agreements between families that cross together and that some may have relatives in Pin Point. Today, much of the purchased land from Mr. Thomas remains in the descendents hands, and the development patterns laid out over 120 years ago along the tracts which are now streets where the community still exists today.

She said that the residents formed a community even before moving there based on faith, education, and trades. During the 1870's and 1880's they established five churches in Sandfly. The 1880 census listed most of the residents as farm hands, laborers, and most could not read or write. By the 1900's each person in the area listed could read and write and the census listed the children of former slaves as at school by name and by age. The Sandfly residents recall that the matriarchs and patriarchs always expected them to get an education. After emancipation the children were taught by missionaries and the Haven Home School was founded in 1882 with the Methodist Episcopal Church through funds that Ms.

G. E. Palen of Philadelphia received from her brother, Mr. Jay Gould, a financier and millionaire. The Haven Home School was first located downtown and then moved to Sandfly, then later to Montgomery Crossroads. Savannah State started in 1891 as Georgia Industrial College and was the school that many Sandfly residents taught at and attended. She talked about the auto races that came into town through Sandfly and how spectators stood alongside the narrow roadway.

By the 1900's Sandfly was very well established and home to 22 carpenters, as well as brick layers, brick masons, woodsmen, cobblers, dress makers, washer women, and seamstresses. During this time nearly all of the adults reported that they could read and write. Because the white trade unions would not allow the blacks to join them the black tradesman who lived in the same area grouped together and developed their own type of union. Each generation in Sandfly passed land parcels down for generations. Land meant independence from white people, interdependence among blacks, and became a physical, tangible reflection of the time and trouble that people put into family. In Sandfly, the family homestead was the first one built on the family property, and as the children married and started families, additional homes for the next generation were built on the family land. Many homes that exist today were built in the early 1900 and 1920 period on family property. By the end of 1920, Wimberley had mortgaged Wormsloe.

During the 1930's field workers from the Savannah unit of the Federal Writers Project interviewed coastal blacks to record African customs still lingering in the community. She gave reference to the book Drums and Shadows regarding Sandfly and that it probably grew out of a series of papers being presented at the Savannah Historical Research Association meetings where many of the members were prominent white Savannahians, including Mr. Alfredo DeRenne from Wormsloe. Mr. Malcolm Bell and Mrs. Muriel Bell were the photographers for the project and Mrs. Bell was Mr. DeRenne's daughter. The Sandfly community was an activity community linked by church, education, employment, and family. The Geechee dialect flavored conversations in the community but the younger generation were taught by the parents and teachers that in order to succeed in school that they would need to speak standard English.

She spoke of how the residents worked, played, worshipped together, and supported each other. They had stores with goods they could not grow or raise, there were fraternal organizations to assist members and were inspired by the teachers to become teachers themselves. The young had jobs at Barbee's Pavilion, the Terrapin Farm on Isle of Hope, and gave tours to travelers at Wormsloe Garden. The young men worked at trades with their fathers and uncles, the families were in church all day, but mostly they did not know that they were poor because they had a lot. The streetcar tracks made up the backbone of the community and the early maps from the 1930 census show how the community grew along Central Avenue, Skidaway, Ferguson, Montgomery Crossroads, Bakers Crossing, and Cedar Hammock. The streetcars were a vital part but buses and automobiles were becoming more typical transportation in the 1940's and 1950's. The streetcar service ended in 1946 but the bus service remained. She stated that the church was a focal point of the community and everything happened there. Baptisms that took place during prayer revival in the spring and that the ceremony has not changed very much. Mr. Kemp still has the baptism stick that was used for the baptisms in the river. There were picnics and reunions that still continue 75 years later. Not every member belonged to the same church and weren't always buried in the same cemetery. Families were related and were buried either in the New Guinea Cemetery or the old church cemetery

She said that the Sandfly tradesmen worked on the DeRenne Apartments, the Fairway homes, the Savannah Bank, Beach High School, Montgomery, and some of the buildings at Georgia Industrial College. Dr. Rossell's students documented many houses that were built in the Kemp family area. Homes were being built again for the children and grandchildren which was customary, and they are known as Luten Hill, Phillips Hill, Kemp Hill, Bivens Hill, and Betsy Bay, which still exist today. Luten Hill is located on Skidaway and started the interest in preserving the area because the widening of Skidaway Road threatened Ms. Matilda Luten, Mr. Chaney Luten, and Mr. Ben Luten's family homes. There are eight homes directly across from Piggly Wiggly in a residential compound of descendents of Ms. Luten; one of the Ms. Mary's persons who came to Wormsloe in 1857. Ms. Luten's son Ben married Chaney Owens, the daughter of slaves from South Carolina. Mr. Chaney acquired the land in 1887 along the streetcar tracks. They had six children and one stepson and provided homes for each of them. Mr. Luten was known as the honorary mayor of Sandfly and the only black conductor for parcel car for the Savannah Electric and Power Company. Before he retired he made sure that all of his children's homes were electrified. Mr. Luten's children and grandchildren became principals, teachers, contractors, supervisors, nurses and brick makers, as well as technicians, businessmen and businesswomen who were and are still leaders in their field and trained in their profession. In the past the Luten families were leaders in the African-American associations, of various teachers' organizations, the brick layers associations, and the contracting associations. When the organizations were integrated, the Lutens were asked to be the leaders of the organizations. Mr. Alexander Luten was asked to be the first black principal at Savannah High School after the football coach and everyone else had been fired.

She said that the Kemp family own two areas in Sandfly; each one handed down by both the maternal and paternal ancestors. Mr. Herbert Kemp's great-grandfather on both his mother and father's side were carpenters who brought skills from the plantation. Mr. Thomas Marion Kemp settled in Sandfly after the Civil War, bought the six acres for \$100, and the homes ran along the streetcar line of Central Avenue and the dirt road. Mr. Kemp donated land to his church and Jenkins store, and on the other side of Kemp Hill a descendent of Mingo Jenkins purchased the land in 1904. These families, like others, have pledged never to sell the land. Mr. Jack Stiles moved to Sandfly after World War II and his father bought the land in Homestead Park in an auction in 1904 and told his children not to sell it for 100 years. Mr. Stiles remembered that there was nothing out there; not even a street light. Mr. Stiles was one of the first certified electricians in the city of Atlanta, a descendent of white slave owners who came to Bryan County from Bermuda to breed Mulattos. Mr. Stiles Sr. and his son were graduates of Hampton Institute in Virginia. The community is an intact community that has been there a long time, is active, and still doing very well.

She stated that parts of the stories are about the modern history that we forget about and when looking at houses, buildings, or structures, and that it is important to inhabit them. That is what they are trying to do by recording the history of the Sandfly community. During the 1970's there were key dates to Savannah and Sandfly such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation which held the annual conference in Savannah in 1968. The same year the citizens of Savannah voted three-to-one to create historic zoning ordinances to protect buildings in downtown Savannah. In 1971 the dirt Skidaway Road was paved, 100 years after the streetcar had opened up opportunities for freed men and women to purchase land and freedom. The paving of Skidaway Road opened up the quiet community and changed what the families had built and kept over the past century. She hoped that by putting together the history of Sandfly that it would help everyone realize it is a community in Savannah that needs to be preserved and has a fabulous history.

Dr. Rossell thanked Ms. Deveau and said that it was nice to have members of the community present.

Mr. Sid Nutting stated that he was one of the people who rode the streetcar through the community in the 30's and 40's. He said he worked with the MPC for approximately ten years on the southeast land use plan where he learned more about Sandfly. In writing the plan he realized that important things happened with a subculture whose destiny was controlled by the plantation owners, and then came Sherman who promised 40 acres and a mule. The people were left with no structure that they were familiar with and they created their own around family tradition and churches which still exist. They fought against commercialization for the area because it is easier to pave over history and he said that it needs to be recorded. He hoped that there would be a continuance of support for history for Savannah and this is only one of the communities. Pin Point and Montgomery are the same and it is suitable and encouraging to see the development of the history being supported.

Ms. Feiler stated that she had an opportunity to work with Mr. Nutting, that he was a wonderful advocate for the Southside, and that it would not have happened without his input.

Mr. Lindell stated that the streetcar was instrumental in bringing transportation to the area. He asked if the infrastructure like the roadbed and bridges still existed or had they been paved over.

Ms. Deveau stated that there is some of the path left and you can see where it went. She said the ties and rails do not exist and the area where the Culvert bridge was still has some pilings. There is a wooded area where the path ran but there aren't any tracks of metal or wood.

Mr. Lindell asked if it has something to do with a bike/hike path in the Isle of Hope area.

Mr. Cohen stated that it is the old bed that they want to convert.

Ms. Deveau stated that it wasn't a railroad like a freight car railroad line but a trolley streetcar line. She said it was more of a narrow gauge.

Dr. Rossell stated that there is other evidence of the streetcar line on Kinsey Avenue at the edge of Gordonston that has a bungalow strip along the edge of the streetcar line. He said that he lives in a 1939 bungalow directly on the streetcar line at Tennessee and Maryland Avenue next to the Roberds Dairy. There is also a little rail line sticking out of the ground near the entrance to Bonaventure Cemetery and asphalt has been placed over part of the rail line.

Dr. Rossell stated that Ms. Deveau is a great resource for bringing out the history, interpreting it, and a huge help for the project.

Mr. Kemp stated that Ms. Deveau has captured the essence of Sandfly and they appreciate her efforts. He said that it has been a long five years but they could see the light at the end of the road. When Wal-Mart and Sam's came, Mr. Meyer stated that Sandfly should do something to preserve the history and it gave them the catalyst to move forward. He said that his grandmother was a midwife and the catcher for Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. There is some history for the house that his grandmother lived in that exists today and said that Pin Point and Sandfly are somewhat connected. He thanked the

Commission for coming in to listen to the presentation, stated that Ms. Harris has been a jewel, and that Ms. Sarah Sisser who is helping is doing an excellent job.

Dr. Rossell stated that the Commission supports the designation. He asked Ms. Harris when they would receive it.

Ms. Harris stated that they are waiting for signatures.

IV. DISCUSSION: Electronic Packets

Ms. Harris stated that there is a possibility of changing over to electronic packets. She said that she wanted to get some feedback and that it would be implemented sometime in the future for all of the MPC Boards. The new Chatham County Resource Protection Committee has already began utilizing it. The packets will come via email and PDF file instead of in paper form and that all of the documents could be viewed there.

Ms. White stated that she receives so many emails with attachments that she is over her limit and that it is stressful. She stated that she would print it out.

Ms. Feiler agreed with Ms. White.

V. APPOINTMENT OF NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Ms. Harris stated that the bylaws state that at the October meeting that the Chairman would appoint a three-member nominating committee to produce a report for the November meeting, vote on it at the December meeting, and that the new Chairman and Vice-Chairman would preside at the January meeting.

Dr. Rossell stated that it would be a three-member committee and he nominated Ms. Feiler, Ms. White, and Ms. Lossing.

VI. UPDATES

A. Revisions to the Chatham County Historic Preservation Ordinance

Ms. Harris stated that when application was made to the Certified Local Government Status that they found that the County Preservation Ordinance was not in compliance with the State Enabling Legislation. They presented some modifications to the Commission. She said that originally the County Attorney thought that it did not need to be modified to be brought into compliance with the State Enabling Legislation, but after discussion with the State Historic Preservation office and the State General Attorney's office they were fine with it being revised. She would place it on next month's agenda.

B. Pin Point Historic District Status

Ms. Harris stated that they have to rezone parcels with R-M-H zoning to R-1 to go forward with the historic designation.

Ms. White left at 3:20 p.m.

VII. COMMISSIONERS' ITEMS

Dr. Rossell stated that Ms. Harris sent out the list of potential sites that might be nominated and designated as part of the Chatham County Historic Preservation Register. He asked if anyone had made any contacts or follow ups.

Ms. Feiler stated that she gave Ms. Harris a list today and asked Ms. Harris to write a letter with both of their signatures to approximately ten people.

Dr. Rossell stated that Ms. Feiler could possibly add a personal touch to the letter with some facts. He said if they don't get an answer in a week or two to give a follow up call.

Ms. Harris stated that Ms. White followed up with Ms. Lois Wooten at the Bamboo Farm who gave them another contact person.

Dr. Rossell stated that Ms. Feiler's example was good in letting Ms. Harris know so that she could form a letter or know who has been contacted. He said he is awaiting response from his contacts.

VIII. MEETING MINUTES: September 3, 2008

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

IX. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Chatham County Historic Preservation Commission, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen Harris,
Preservation Planner

EH/jnp