



COASTAL GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Our mission is to connect people to Coastal Georgia's dynamic history through the stories we share and the collections we preserve.

The Coastal Georgia Historical Society is dedicated to the original vision of our founders to serve Glynn County and the Coastal Georgia region. In the spirit of our refreshed mission statement, shown above, a series of articles will explore the dynamic history of our region. This article is the first of four installments appearing the second Saturday of each month through December.

Spanning the Marshes of Glynn: A Road to the Future

Before 1924, traveling from Brunswick to St. Simons Island required a lengthy trip aboard one of the steam-powered ferries that chugged back and forth between the Port of Brunswick and the St. Simons Pier. Without easy access, the island's population numbered roughly 900 permanent residents, compared to over 14,400 in the thriving City of Brunswick.

A roadway across multiple rivers and expansive marshland was long thought to be impractical, if not impossible. By 1922, however, Brunswick Mayor Malcolm McKinnon, a proponent of local tourism, was leading the effort to achieve this goal and asked Fernando J.

Torras to engineer the roadway. Torras, a Brunswick native and Georgia Tech graduate, had spent his early career building roads and railroads through the swamps and jungles of South America.

Under Torras' leadership, the project took only 14 months to complete at a cost of \$412,000, and the causeway officially opened on July 11, 1924. The 4.2-mile gravel road included a series of trestles spanning Terry Creek, Little River, and Mackay River, and two 280-foot swing bridges over Back and Frederica rivers. More than 20,000 people participated in festivities to celebrate the opening, an event that would indelibly change the character of our region.

Over the next 25 years, the population of St. Simons more than doubled. Due to ever increasing traffic, the causeway and its bridges were wearing out by the late 1940s. Glynn County commissioned the St. Louis engineering firm of Sverdrup and Parcel to design a new highway, which

would also be touted for innovative engineering. Using newly developed molds, major parts of the bridges were precast in concrete rather than being poured on site, saving both time and money. Again, the project was completed in just over a year, but this time at a cost of \$2,500,000. Two bridges with vertical lift spans replaced the original swing bridges. Dedicated on June 9, 1950, the new causeway was named in honor of Fernando J. Torras in 1953.

In the 1980s, the road was widened from two lanes to four, and fixed bridges replaced those with lifts, ending delays for river traffic. Since then, the population of the island has continued to grow and now nearly matches that of Brunswick.

Preserving and sharing local stories like this one have always been central to the mission of the Coastal Georgia Historical Society. The organization was founded in 1965, when a small group of residents recognized the urgent need to preserve historical documents stored at Brunswick Junior College, now College of Coastal Georgia. Five years later, the St. Simons Lighthouse Keeper's Dwelling was under threat of development, and the Society stepped up to save the building and create a Museum of Coastal History. As a result, the Society has been headquartered on St. Simons Island. But we've never forgotten our roots, nor our love for the history of Brunswick and Glynn County's other mainland communities.

In the spirit of the historic causeway that has connected us for nearly 100 years, we are traveling back to Brunswick this fall for a series of programs on the history of the City by the Sea. We invite everyone to join us and learn what makes the history of our region so unique.



Opening Day Ceremony, July 1924, Frederica River Bridge



Vertical Lift Bridge, Frederica River. Starting in the 1950s, a causeway toll of \$.25 was charged, which later increased to \$.35. The roadway has been toll-free since 2003.

Upcoming Society Programs in Brunswick

An Overview of Historic Brunswick: Our City by the Sea

In Partnership with the Friends of the Brunswick-Glynn Library

Presented by Society Senior Historian Buddy Sullivan · October 5, 12, 4–6 p.m. at the Brunswick-Glynn County Library

Cost: \$35 for the two lectures

Downtown Brunswick Walking Tours

Presented by Coastal Georgia Historical Society Historians · Cost: \$20 per person per tour

October 3, 3–5 p.m. · October 24, 3–5 p.m. · November 21, 3–5 p.m. · December 12, 3–5 p.m.

Registration is required for all programs. Visit coastalgeorgiahistory.org for more information and to register.

The Coastal Georgia Historical Society is headquartered in the A.W. Jones Heritage Center, located on the campus of the St. Simons Lighthouse Museum. The Society is the owner of the St. Simons Lighthouse and custodian of the Lighthouse Keeper's Dwelling and Historic Coast Guard Station at East Beach, which houses the World War II Home Front Museum. We welcome the public to the museums 360 days a year.

