



COASTAL GEORGIA
**HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

NEWSLETTER

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

Fall 2025

Fall Member Meeting: *Georgia Wine History, An Interactive Talk and Tasting*



A cultivated muscadine vine

From the moment Europeans set foot on the North American continent, they fantasized about producing one specific commodity that would not only make them money but improve their lives in this wild New World: wine. But their vision centered not on California, where today's American wine industry flourishes; it focused on states like Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia. It was in the South that generations of Americans, including well-known figures like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, repeatedly tried and failed to make American wine palatable and marketable. And it was in the South that experimentation and discovery finally led to a successful domestic wine industry. The particularities of southern soil, climate, topography, and labor shaped the long and bumpy road to realizing the centuries-old dream of American wine.

Continued on next page

During this interactive program, members will explore this history not only through listening but through tasting. Based on research for her new book, Dr. Whitney Nell Stewart—CGHS's Executive Director—will guide us through the high hopes and dashed dreams, the persistent failures and remarkable successes of Georgian winemakers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Along the way, we'll taste some twenty-first-century wines that will illuminate how something as seemingly frivolous as a fermented beverage reveals new insights into our nation's most important debates over economic, political, cultural, and even moral questions. **With limited space due to the program's innovative format, this event will fill up quickly; register soon!**

Whitney Nell Stewart is an author, educator, and scholar of southern history. Her work has been supported by dozens of research and writing fellowships, including most recently at the International Center for Jefferson Studies and the George Washington Presidential Library. Whitney also holds a Level 2 Certificate in Wine from the Wine & Spirit Education Trust.

The Fall Program will be held at **6 p.m. on Thursday, October 16, 2025, at the A.W. Jones Heritage Center**. Members attend the program free of charge, and the cost for non-members is \$20. Please visit coastalgeorgiahistory.org to reserve your seat.

MR. AXT'S GRAPES—GEORGIA VINEYARDS—SOUTHERN WINE.

IN our September number of the year 1853, (page 280) we briefly adverted to the beginning of what we must consider the Grape Growing and Wine making era of Georgia ; and it now affords us peculiar pleasure to record the progress already made, and the future promise of the enterprise.

An article from the Southern Cultivator (Augusta, GA) vol. 13, no. 10 (1855).

Caitlyn Price, Education and Programs Coordinator

The Society welcomes Caitlyn Price, our new Education and Programs Coordinator! Caitlyn grew up in Orlando, Florida and received a B.A. in Environmental Science from Stetson University in 2013. That same year, she commissioned into the United States Army Reserves and continues to drill monthly with her Logistics unit. She has moved across the country for the past 10 years working for the National Park Service. Throughout her park service career, she worked in interpretation, education, and volunteer coordination. In 2024, she completed her M.A. in American History from Gettysburg College and the Gilder Lehrman Institute. Caitlyn now lives in Brunswick with her husband, son, and two cats and loves exploring outdoors and reading.

Do you love Coastal Georgia history, sharing stories with the public, or educating young audiences? Contact Caitlyn to join the CGHS Volunteer Program as a docent for the St. Simons Island Lighthouse, the World War II Home Front Museum, or as a school tour docent! For more information, reach out to Caitlyn at cprice@coastalgeorgiahistory.org.



BRUNSWICK LECTURE SERIES

The 2025 Brunswick Lecture Series features an exciting slate of four speakers, expanding the series beyond the Brunswick city limits and across several centuries of our area's fascinating history. The series will be held at the **College of Coastal Georgia's Stembler Theatre, located within the Campus Center, on Tuesdays, October 7, 14, 21, and 28 from 4 – 5:30 p.m.**

Buddy Sullivan, the Coastal Georgia Historical Society's Consulting Historian, will deliver the first lecture on **October 7**. His program will focus on the **history of Butler Island and the life of Frances Anne Kemble**, a 19th century Englishwoman who wrote and published a journal that influenced attitudes on slavery in both Britain and the United States. Kemble recorded her observations during the months spent on her husband Pierce M. Butler's Altamaha River and St. Simons Island plantations in 1838 and 1839. Sullivan's lecture will review the five generations of the Butler family that owned Butler Island and Hampton Plantation, with a particular focus on Kemble, her marriage to Pierce Butler, and their descendants.

On **October 14**, the Society welcomes **Hector Montford, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor of History at the College of Coastal Georgia, who is part of the lecture series for the third year in a row! Dr. Montford will present **"Brunswick's New Deal,"** which will explore the array of New Deal projects and programs in Brunswick during the Great Depression. The presentation will also highlight the people involved with New Deal programs locally, and the lasting legacy of the projects in the community.

Josh Dukes, a member of the Brunswick Historic Preservation Board and co-author of the recent book *Brunswick: Past & Present*, will present **"Why Was the Oglethorpe Hotel Torn Down?"** on **October 21**. The program begins in 1888, when Brunswick unveiled the Oglethorpe Hotel—an architectural masterpiece by J. A. Wood that became the city's social and cultural centerpiece until its unexpected and controversial end in 1958. This lecture explores the hotel's celebrated



past, the chain of events that sealed its fate, and how shifting tastes in design and development played their part. Along the way, the program will uncover what became of the sought-after leftovers, and celebrate the memories left behind when Brunswick's most famous landmark vanished from the skyline.

The series concludes on **October 28** with a presentation by **Allison Dupuis**, CGHS's Historian. In **"Story of Stories: The Brunswick Advocate and the Life of a City, 1837 -1839,"** she will explore the life of the city through the lens of this vital but short-lived newspaper. When business partners Davis and Short published the first issue of the *Advocate* on June 8, 1837, they had lofty goals for both their paper and their city. Over the next two years, until the onset of a recession in 1839, the *Advocate's* weekly editions illuminated local happenings, business news, and points of view on national issues. Today, the 103 editions of the *Brunswick Advocate* reveal what life was like for people here: men and women, young and old, enslaved and free.

The cost for the series is \$40, and registration is required. Individual program tickets are available for purchase at \$20 per lecture. To register, please visit coastalgeorgiahistory.org. A map of the College of Coastal Georgia Campus and directions to the Stembler Theatre are available on the registration page.

Journeys 2025

Waterfront Commerce and Plantation Life in Darien

This year's Journeys program will begin with a lecture by Buddy Sullivan, the Society's Consulting Historian, who will present a history of Darien on **Thursday, November 13 at the A. W. Jones Heritage Center.**

Darien is the second oldest town in the state of Georgia, founded by Scottish Highlanders in 1736, and possessing a history unique among Southern tidewater communities.

Darien was a major cotton exporting center in the antebellum period before the town was burned to the ground by invading Union troops in the Civil War. Within a few years, a rebuilt Darien became the largest exporter of processed lumber on the U.S. east coast, a testament to the town's resilience, and reflecting its Scottish heritage. This

program will provide an overview of the town's history and economy, emphasizing its maritime development and its waterfront commerce, including the recently restored Adam Strain Building, a 200-year old structure that is now one of the centerpieces of Darien's resurgence as a tourism destination.

The **Journeys field trip on November 20** will explore the enduring impact of daily life and trade in and around Darien, Georgia. Led by our staff archaeologist, Dr. Aaron Ellrich, the journey delves into the intertwined histories of plantation life and waterfront commerce through visits to Elizafield Plantation, Hopeton-on-the-Altamaha, Laurel Grove Plantation, Darien's historic waterfront, the Adam Strain Building, and Butler Island's rice mill ruins. Along the way, participants will reflect on the lasting legacies of enslaved labor, industrial ambition, and coastal enterprise, all made visible through tabby ruins, a restored historic building, and artifacts that illuminate Coastal Georgia's layered past.

The **Journeys program on November 20** is scheduled to run from **8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.** Due to site access and space limitations, the tour is limited to **30 participants.** The field trip is \$100 per person, and includes guided tours of the sites and lunch at Tabby House Brewing Company. Once purchased, tickets are non-refundable, although they may be transferred to another person. Registration will open on **Wednesday, October 1** and will close when full.

The November 13 lecture by Buddy Sullivan will be held at **6 p.m. at the A.W. Jones Heritage Center.** The lecture is free for members and \$10 for non-members.



Tabby ruins on Darien's waterfront.

Junior Internship Highlight

This year, the Society created a two-week internship program for high school students. Mary, a student from London with Coastal Georgia roots, was the inaugural intern for this program. Over her internship tenure, Mary provided great insight and fresh ideas for education programs based on Georgia State Standards. We are hopeful that we can continue this outreach next summer. About her experience, Mary wrote: "I've gained not only a deeper knowledge of the area's rich history, but also a real sense of how history can be made engaging and accessible for younger generations. Working alongside such welcoming and passionate staff has shown me the power of community in preserving and sharing our past—and it's left me more inspired than ever to keep exploring the history of where I came from."



Mary, CGHS Junior Intern, at the St. Simons Lighthouse Museum.

CGHS IS *Making History*

It's been an exciting summer at CGHS! Dr. Aaron Ellrich, the Society's Archaeologist, has been island hopping along the Georgia coast. On Cumberland Island, he and Dr. Lindsey Cochran, the Society's consulting archaeologist, taught Eastern Tennessee State University undergraduate students the fundamentals of field archaeology. Much of this work centered on the Brickhill Bluff Freedmen's Village, one of Cumberland's earliest freedmen settlements. Dr. Ellrich and Dr. Cochran also went to Sapelo Island, where they took part in fieldwork and visited archaeological sites around the island like Chocolate Plantation and the Sapelo Shell Ring.

Allison Dupuis, the Society's Historian, celebrated the St. Simons Lighthouse on two separate occasions: a program at Vitality Living Frederica for National Lighthouse Day in early August, and another exploration of the Lighthouse's history in honor of its birthday at SOAR Golden Isles in September. She transported the life ring from the SS *Esso Baton Rouge* to Atlanta for conservation in August. The life ring's conservation will take place thanks to a grant from the Friends of Coastal Georgia History. On the same trip, Allison picked up a donation of bottles excavated in Brunswick in the 1960s and 1970s by Rick and Sandy Krause. See the photo for a look at the fascinating diversity of this donation!

[Continued on next page](#)



Archaeological field school at the Brickhill site on Cumberland Island.



Glass bottles found in Brunswick by Rick and Sandy Krause in the 1960s and 1970s.

Dr. Whitney Nell Stewart, our new Executive Director, recently participated in a roundtable about Heritage Tourism at the American Association of State and Local History's annual conference. She published a book review in the latest edition of the *Journal of Southern History* and was appointed to the Editorial Board of the *Journal of the Civil War Era*. Dr. Stewart will also serve on the Finance Committee of the National Council on Public History.

Preservation—Windows and Lightning Strikes

Structural preservation and maintenance have been major themes of the summer at the St. Simons Lighthouse and Keeper's Dwelling. At the Keeper's Dwelling, several windows were replaced and one on the east wall was repaired. Any salvageable piece was repaired, and necessary replacements were made, always replicating the original windows. New shutters were also installed on the upper floor's windows, along with new shutter bolts and hinges. Austin Historical ensured that the shutters line up and the hinges work properly so that the shutters can be closed during a hurricane.

In June and July, lightning literally struck twice at the Lighthouse. Following an overnight storm on June 8th, the Lighthouse's beam went dark for a full month. The Coast Guard arrived to inspect and repair the light and its mechanism. It was shining again on July 8th, only for another sudden thunderstorm to have the same effect a mere two days later. A Coast Guard electrician once again repaired the light after the July 10th storm, installing a grounding wire and surge protector. The Lighthouse was once again fully functional by the end of the month. The repair and the process behind it were featured in the *Brunswick News*.

Contributions to CGHS's Preservation Fund help to protect the historic structures under the Society's care. For more information about donations and contributing to the Preservation Fund, contact Sheila VanderWood, the Society's Director of Development, at (912) 634-7096 or svanderwood@coastalgeorgiahistory.org.



Preservation work on windows at the Keeper's Dwelling by Austin Historical.

PLANNED GIVING REMINDER

Maintaining our momentum is dependent on people who understand that preserving our history is a cause that has no end. **Planned giving is a way for you to continue your support into the future.** Your participation in our planned giving program will help us build the reserves that we need to make timely and comprehensive repairs thereby ensuring that future generations can experience the St. Simons Lighthouse and Keeper's Dwelling and the World War II Home Front Museum. We are truly grateful for your partnership, generosity, and consideration of the Historical Society in your estate planning. For more information on planned giving, please contact Sheila VanderWood at (912) 634-7096 or svanderwood@coastalgeorgiahistory.org.



Membership Highlights

Thank you to those who have generously upgraded their membership or increased their level of annual giving.

Keepers of the Light

Rene and Peter Boven –
Luminary
Linda and Jay Buchert –
Patron

Jennifer and Rick Farrell –
Sustainer

Kathleen and Kevin Flynn –
Sustainer

Shannon and Stephen
Gilreath – Sustainer

Alice Glenn – Luminary

Robbie and Betsy Turner –
Sustainer

General

Pam and Mike Balsley –
Family

Grace Barone – Family
Robbie Clark – Individual
Walter Ray Davis Jr. –
Individual

Clark Issac – Lamplighter
Ronald Jacobs and Marsha
Jenkins – Family

James Jones – Assistant
Keeper

Creta Nichols – Individual
Carl Svendsen III – Assistant
Keeper

Matilon and Mike Tillitski –
Lamplighter

Jodi and JT Tvrdik –
Lamplighter

Ann Wright – Family

Welcome New Members!

Keepers of the Light

Dr. Whitney Stewart and
Dr. Ben Wright – Sustainer
Robert Thomas – Sustainer

General

Clark and Terri Candler –
Family

Pat Coughlin – Individual

Scotti and Emily Douglas –
Family

Doug and Nancy Gadd –
Family

Susan Fant – Individual

Lisa Grove – Family

William Hansen –
Individual

Betsy Howard – Individual
Matthew Lund – Family
Catherine McCrary –
Individual

Rebecca Mehnert – Family
Susan Muller and Steve
Budnick – Family

Charlene Noble – Family
Robert Reifsnyder – Family

Jeremy Scanlon – Family

Tibbett Speer – Family

Deborah States – Individual

Jay Torbert – Family

Tribute Gifts

In Memory Of Claire Ellen Winne
By Capt. & Mrs. Lee Tabenken

*We appreciate you, our loyal members, for your continued support.
When you renew, please consider a greater investment in the Society.*

Calendar of Events

Fall Member Meeting

Thursday, October 16

“Georgia Wine History:
An Interactive Talk and Tasting”
Whitney Nell Stewart, Ph.D.

6 p.m.

A.W. Jones Heritage Center
CGHS members free;
\$20 non-members

Brunswick Lecture Series

October 7
Buddy Sullivan

October 14
Hector Montford, Ph.D.

October 21
Josh Dukes

October 28
Allison Dupuis

4 – 5:30 p.m.

Stempler Theatre,
College of Coastal Georgia
\$40 per person for series;
\$20 individual programs

Journeys

Thursday, November 13
Lecture: History of Darien
Buddy Sullivan

6 p.m.

A.W. Jones Heritage Center
CGHS members free;
\$10 non-members

Thursday, November 20
Field trip: Tolomato, Darien,
and Butler Island

8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
\$100 per person

Registration for field trip opens
Wednesday, October 1



COASTAL GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 21136
St. Simons Island
Georgia 31522

FIRST CLASS
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Brunswick, GA
31520
Permit No. 369

Our Staff

Executive Director

Whitney Nell Stewart, Ph.D.

Staff Archaeologist

Aaron Ellrich, Ph.D.

Historian

Allison Dupuis

Director of Development

Sheila VanderWood

Education and Programs Coordinator

Caitlyn Price

Office Manager

Trish Scott

Director of Retail Operations

Eric Oberg

Consulting Historian

Buddy Sullivan

Consulting Archaeologist

Lindsey Cochran, Ph.D.

2025 Board of Directors

Executive Committee

Steve Kerr

President

Mary Schellhorn

Immediate Past President

Greer Brown

Vice President

Jeffrey Molitor

Treasurer

Janis Rehlaender

Secretary

Whitney Nell Stewart, Ph.D.

Executive Director

Jack Crews

Brad Danowski

Chris Ernst

Johnny Evans, Ph.D.

Shannon Gilreath

Cheryl Hargrove

John Hunter

John Jaje

Susan Lawhorne

Susan Myers

Call (912) 634-7090, follow us online,
or visit coastalgeorgiahistory.org



American
Alliance of
Museums



COASTAL GEORGIA
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear members,

As summer transitions into fall, we at CGHS are also in a moment of change. After five months as the Director of Collections & Education, a position that gave me insight into all we do, I am humbled to now serve as the Society's new Executive Director. I follow in the footsteps of a short list of incredible women who have led this organization, and none with the kind of reputation for excellence and success like that of my immediate predecessor, Sherri Jones. She and Mimi Rogers laid a solid institutional and curatorial foundation that helped establish CGHS as a premier local history institution.

We now have the opportunity to build upon that foundation. With our Strategic Plan as a guide, we will deepen our roots as a community museum while realizing an expanded role as the region's center for historical research and education. As a scholar, author, and educator with more than a decade of experience at historic sites and universities, I am excited to lead our dedicated team into this new era.

I haven't had the pleasure of meeting every CGHS member yet, so let me take a moment to introduce myself. I am, simply put, a history nerd. I hold a PhD in History from Rice University. I spent seven years as a professor of history at the University of Texas at Dallas, where I taught American history to thousands of students. I've written award-winning articles and books, including *This Is Our Home: Slavery and Struggle on Southern Plantations* (UNC Press, 2023). I've worked in museums, archives, and libraries across the country, including the Bayou Bend Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, The Henry Ford in Michigan, the Historic New Orleans Collection, and the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

Like many of you, my love affair with history goes back to my youth. I grew up listening to the Alabama twang of my parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, who regaled me with harrowing, hilarious, and hyperbolic tales of southern life. I rummaged through boxes of heirlooms and read old letters that divulged secrets of long-gone family members. I ran through cotton fields and played in old houses, always stopping to look at the portraits of folks who looked eerily like me. I now realize that I was becoming a historian all along: researching, analyzing, seeking to understand the past and connect it to the present.

It's that sense of discovery, enlightenment, and relevance to our world today that draws me to history, and as Executive Director I want to encourage that interactive engagement with the past. History is not just something you read; it's something you *do*. Let's engage students and adults, visitors and residents, scholars and the wider public in exploring and experiencing the richness of Coastal Georgia history. I can't wait to bring more people into the exciting process of doing history together.

But the most important thing I will do over the next few months is listen. I want to learn as much about the Society, the community, and Coastal Georgia as I can. That means talking with you! Please join me and our fabulous CGHS staff at our upcoming programs: October's Brunswick Lecture Series and Fall Member Meeting, and November's Journeys programs. Look forward to seeing y'all there.

Cheers,

Whitney Nell Stewart, PhD



P.O. Box 21136, St. Simons Island, Georgia 31522
Ph. (912) 638.4666 Fax (912) 638.6609

COASTALGEORGIAHISTORY.ORG