



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