

The Gullah People

Objective

Students will understand the significance and history of the Gullah people.

Procedure

1. Students will conduct an I-Search project on the Gullah people. Possible topics include: history, food, language, story telling, music, basketry, religious traditions, folk lore, arts and crafts, geographic location, life-style, and dress.
2. Students will write a report and design some kind of visual representation (quilt design, sing a song, show a basket, make a dish to share with the class, etc.

Evaluation

Projects and visual representations will be graded.

Additional Resources

1. Internet
2. My Friend the Gullah by J. Gary Black
3. Reminiscences of Sea Island Heritage by Ronald Daise
4. Bridges to Change by Kathleen Krull
5. The Water Brought Us by Muriel Branch

(dogpile.com)



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In the Land of the Gullahs

By Gary Lee

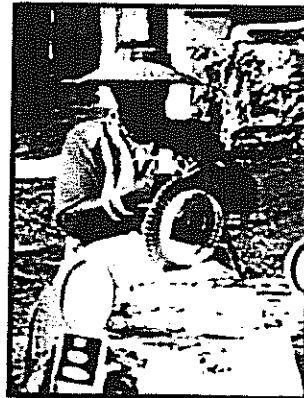
Washington Post Staff Writer

Sunday, September 20, 1998; Page E01

Related Items

- Accompanying travel tips in Details: Gullah Tour
- Current weather and seasonal averages for locations in Georgia and South Carolina
- News, Internet resources and more on our Georgia and South Carolina Pages

When I entered the village church the congregation was in full swing, belting out the day's scripture in what sounded like an African dialect. I did not understand a word, but that didn't matter. As I looked with uncertainty into the faces of the crowd--from a matronly villager with skin the color of cocoa to a burly brother with a '60s Afro--all returned heartfelt smiles.



A Gullah woman makes sweetgrass baskets, an African handicraft dating back hundreds of years. (Greater Beaufort Chamber of Commerce)

Uplifted by a Sunday morning of African-style worship, I followed the scent of catfish and collard greens to a favored local hangout. Along the wooden porch a couple of women in braids were setting out sweetgrass baskets, a handicraft common in West African markets. Under a sagging willow, a few village elders chewed the fat of the week. Inside, families were digging into bowls of gumbo and platters of rice and okra. In nearly every town along Africa's Gold Coast from Sierra Leone to Senegal, I imagined, similar scenes were taking place.

The catch was, I was not in Africa. I was on St. Helena, an island off the marshy shores of South Carolina and home to the Gullahs. Descended from slaves brought from Africa to the Georgia and South Carolina coast in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Gullahs have clung passionately to the languages, foods and traditions of their origin. While the rest of America, including much of the African American population, is swept up in a tide of cultural homogeneity marked by Nike shoes, baseball hats and Top 10 hits, the Gullahs have held resolutely to the rice dishes, prayer rituals, rites and chants that their grandfathers' grandfathers brought from the Motherland.

Although they probably descend from different African countries and disparate tribes, Gullahs today are identified by their common language. Gullah is a Creolized language composed of words from English and several African tongues. Although some members of an older generation still communicate largely in Gullah, most Gullahs

use it as secondary tongue to chat with one another. For almost all of them, English is the first language.

Gullah country does not refer to a single island or town but a string of communities in the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia. Other Gullah enclaves have been traced as far off as Texas and Oklahoma. An intriguing destination for any traveler, the stretch of the South that many Gullahs call home seems to offer something particularly attractive to Americans descended from slaves. It is a dramatic reminder that, in the vast multicultural forest of the contemporary United States, African Americans have roots as deep as any other ethnic group.

My introduction to the world of Gullah came through cinema and literature. The 1991 movie "Daughters of the Dust" depicted a community of Gullahs battling to keep the mores of the New World from subsuming their tight-knit social circles. "Down by the Riverside," a historical account of life on South Carolina Low Country plantations, gives rich details of how slaves brought from Africa to South Carolina worked to retain aspects of their African heritage, from songs to burial traditions.

But neither the book nor film renderings of the Gullah story fully prepared me for my wanderings through the settlements where Gullahs live and gather.

To observe the Gullahs is to see a people who have been resolute about preserving their culture on American soil. Their skin tones run from the deep color of coffee beans to the hue of brown sugar. And their features, including full lips and big round eyes, recall the look of many West Africans.

"When we look for partners, we tend to look among our own people," explained Jean Smith, a retired seamstress I met on my Sunday morning stroll through St. Helena. "We don't intermarry much. That's why you see more African features in our looks." Dark skinned and direct, she was clearly proud of her culture and eager to share it.

The Gullahs I met were a fountainhead of inspiration. Among the most memorable was Emory Campbell, whose graying hair and thoughtful speech gave him an elegant Old World demeanor. As director of the Penn Center, devoted to the preservation of African culture and to the service of the African American community, Campbell straddles the enclave of Gullahs and the outside world of South Carolina. Started by Quakers in the 1800s as a private school for African Americans, the Penn Center is a cluster of buildings in St. Helena that includes a small museum and a bookstore, both of which highlight Gullah literature and history.

"We would like to think that we are a symbol of the resilience of Africa on American soil," Campbell said as we toured Gullah neighborhoods. "We are Americans, but our bond to Africa is strong. We feel it every day."

The number of Gullahs along the South Carolina and Georgia coasts has dwindled over the years, making estimates of the number of survivors difficult. But a 1979 survey by the Summer Institute of Linguistics found 100,000 Gullah speakers in the region, including 10,000 who spoke only Gullah. By Campbell's anecdotal account, thousands of families still make their homes in Hilton Head, St. Helena and other islands off South Carolina and Georgia. Many remain in the same areas where their ancestors worked rice plantations as slaves.

Beyond the people, I saw a clear African influence on Gullah dining tables. One popular dish is a gumbo containing okra, fish and hot peppers. Served with red rice, it is similar to jollof rice, a dish beloved in West Africa. White rice, a staple recalling Gullah ancestors' heritage as rice growers along the African coast, is still served at nearly every meal.

As I sat in Gullah living rooms, I sometimes heard their singsong dialect rise above the southern drawl more commonly heard in these parts. I caught a few English words here and there. But Gullah is also full of expressions used in Krio, a dialect widely spoken in Sierra Leone.

"De Fox en de Crow," a familiar Gullah fable, includes the following: "Fox call to de Crow: 'Mawmin tittuh,' he say. 'Uh so glad you tief da meat fum de buckruh.' "

Translation: "Fox called to the crow: 'Morning girl,' he said. 'I'm so glad you stole that meat from the white man.' "

Through more than two decades of painstaking research, Joseph Opala, a scholar at the Penn Center, has documented the strong links between the Gullah peoples of South Carolina and Sierra Leone. By pinpointing languages, foods and other customs shared by Gullahs and Sierra Leoneans, Opala has concluded that a large percentage of the Gullah peoples originated in Sierra Leone. In need of labor able to work in the humid, sweltering rice plantations, slave traders turned to Sierra Leone because it was a rice-growing region with a climate similar to South Carolina and Georgia. In recent years, a series of exchange visits between Gullahs and delegations from Sierra Leone have dramatized the ties between the two groups.

Guinea, Senegal and Liberia are also probable countries of origin of

some Gullahs, according to scholars.

A casual traveler touring the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia will find no towering monument to the Gullah people. There is no major Gullah museum or information center. No marker depicting the location of Gullah settlements. Without assistance, it is easy to drive through the Sea Islands, stretching a couple of hundred miles, and hardly notice the Gullah presence.

But a couple of local organizations organize annual festivals, featuring music, dance, cuisine, crafts and presentations about Gullah life and history. (See Details, Page E9). Arriving in Gullah country between festivals, I relied on Campbell and a couple of other locals to serve as my guides. In a tour around Hilton Head, S.C., Campbell pointed out the areas where Gullahs were once based in large numbers, and the few scattered communities where they continue to live. During a two-hour drive, he showed us a Gullah cemetery and an oversize rock that was once used as a Gullah meeting spot.

But the most remarkable stop was a cluster of modern houses arranged in a semicircle. Initially, it looked like any other cluster of middle-class homes. But the settlement, featuring three rows of houses, was modeled after an African village. It was the home of an extended Gullah family in which the elders live in the middle, the children in the surrounding semicircle and the grandchildren in the outer ring. The original cottages had been replaced by contemporary homes, he added, but the concept remained.

Campbell, who grew up on Hilton Head and still makes his home there, told me the dramatic saga of the Gullah people on the island: how white rice plantation owners, unable to bear the heat and the disease common in the region, often left the Gullahs to their labors with little supervision.

Even after the Civil War, the Gullahs remained a world apart. One of the driving factors in that isolation, according to Campbell, was a desire to maintain the purity of the culture. Another was the fact that Gullah settlements, mostly based on out-of-the-way islands, were located in places that provided little contact with whites or any other outside cultures.

But when new roads began to link Hilton Head and the other islands to mainland South Carolina in the 1960s, many of the Gullahs sold their family plots to developers and either moved away or integrated into South Carolina and Georgia society. As opportunities began to open for African Americans in the South, many Gullahs sought to integrate into the wider community.

"When my grandmother spoke to us in Gullah, we used to laugh. We

thought it was outmoded," Campbell said. "Now we understand that it provides our strongest link to our African past."

Inspired by a resurgence of the roots movement and a sense that their society is at risk of dying away, many have begun to take renewed interest in preserving Gullah ways. A number of Gullah families who had moved to other parts of the country are now returning, according to Deborah Robertson, a woman with coffee-colored skin whom I met over lunch in the town of Beaufort. She moved away to New York and other places a decade ago, only to return home last year. "We're all discovering that the culture we have here is unique and worth holding onto," she said.

The next day Kitty Green, a guide with Gullah & Geechee Mahn Tours, took me on a drive around St. Helena, which is next to Hilton Head, about two hours by car from Charleston. One stop was a cemetery where many of the Gullah had buried their dead. In the African tradition, some of the graves were covered with glass and dishes, apparently to serve the dead in afterlife. Even today, some Gullah will pass the youngest baby over a new grave before covering the burial with dirt, the guide said. The idea is to keep the spirit of the deceased from coming back to haunt the baby.

Down the road was a "praise house," a one-room building used as a Gullah meeting house as far back as the early 1800s. It's a white clapboard structure, almost hauntingly simplistic. Local African Americans still use it for occasional meetings, Green said. The Brick Church, the Baptist house of worship where I attended a Sunday service, was built in the mid-1800s by slaves. The church's congregation is not exclusively Gullah, and the services are usually held in English, the guide explained. But Gullah translations are sometimes used during services.

Before leaving the area, I dropped back into a midweek service at the church. As the crowd began to recite the closing scripture, I closed my eyes and listened. "Gee we de food wa we da need dis day yah an ebriday," they said. "Fabige we fa de bad ting we da do."

As I listened, the words became suddenly familiar. "Give us this day our daily bread," went the passage from the Gospel according to Luke. "And forgive us our trespasses."

Details: Gullah Tour

Getting There: St. Helena, S.C., is a good starting point. Fly to Savannah, Ga., rent a car and drive the 30 miles or so to St. Helena. United Express is advertising a round-trip fare between Dulles and Savannah of \$185, with restrictions. Driving, count on at least 10

hours for the 500-plus mile trip.

Where to Stay: Hampton Inn (843-986-0600), in Beaufort, a few miles from St. Helena, has doubles for \$80. Two Suns Inn (843-522-1122), a charming B&B at 1705 Bay St. in Beaufort, has doubles for \$120 and up.

What to Do: The Penn Center, on St. Helena, will provide the basics for a crash course in Gullah culture. For more information, call 843-838-2432.

I took three tours. Gullah and Geechee Mahn Tours (843-838-7516) offers a \$17, 2 1/2-hour tour of St. Helena and surroundings, including churches, cemetery and other remnants of Gullah culture. Gullah Tours (843-763-7551) offers a \$15 two-hour tour of Gullah relics in Charleston. Gullah Heritage Trail Tours (843-681-7066) does a good two-hour trip around Hilton Head for \$20.

Three Gullah educational and cultural events are held annually. The three-day Penn Center Heritage Days Celebration, scheduled for Nov. 12-14, is the most important for those eager to learn more about the Gullahs. It includes Gullah song and cuisine as well as in-depth lectures in history. Call the Penn Center (see above).

The Gullah Festival, held in Beaufort every May, highlights the culture's entertainment aspects. Contact the Beaufort Chamber of Commerce, 843-524-3163.

The Native Islander Gullah Celebration is held each winter in Hilton Head. Call the Hilton Head Chamber of Commerce, 843-785-3673.

Where to Eat: Ultimate Eating (843-838-1314), in St. Helena, serves all the Gullah basics. A down-home lunch for two will cost about \$30. Abe's Shrimp House (843-785-3675), on Hilton Head, serves basic Gullah food.

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Project SuGA

Division of Endocrinology
Medical University of South Carolina

The Gullah* People

The Gullah* are a distinctive group of Black Americans from South Carolina and Georgia in the southeastern United States. They live in small farming and fish communities along the Atlantic coastal plain and on the chain of Sea Islands which runs parallel to the coast. Because of their geographical isolation and strong community life, the Gullah* have been able to preserve more of their African cultural heritage than any other group of Black Americans. They speak a creole language similar to Sierra Leone Krio, use African names, tell African folktales, make African-style handicrafts such as baskets and carved walking sticks, and enjoy a rich cuisine based primarily on rice.

Indeed, rice is what forms the special link between the Gullah* and the people of Sierra Leone. During the 1700s the American colonists in South Carolina and Georgia discovered that rice would grow well in the moist, semitropical country bordering their coastline. But the American colonists had no experience with the cultivation of rice, and they needed African slaves who knew how to plant, harvest, and process this difficult crop. The white plantation owners purchased slaves from various parts of Africa, but they greatly preferred slaves from what they called the "Rice Coast" or "Windward Coast" - the traditional rice-growing region of West Africa, stretching from Senegal down to Sierra Leone and Liberia. The plantation owners were willing to pay higher prices for slaves from this area, and Africans from the Rice Coast were almost certainly the largest group of slaves imported into South Carolina and Georgia during the 18th century.

The Gullah* people are directly descended from the slaves who labored on the plantations, and their language reflects significant influences from Sierra Leone and the surrounding area. The Gullahs'* English-based creole language is strikingly similar to Sierra Leone Krio and contains such identical expressions as: bigyai (greedy), pantap (on top of), chitu (both), yeys (ear), and swit (delicious). But, in addition to words derived from English, the Gullah creole also contains several thousand words and personal names derived from African languages - a large proportion of these (about 25%) are from languages spoken in Sierra Leone. The Gullah* use such masculine names as Sorie, Tamba, Sanie, Vandie and Ndapi and such feminine names as Kadiatu, Fatimata, Hawa, Isata - all common in Sierra Leone. As late as the 1940s, a Black American linguist found Gullahs* in rural South Carolina and Georgia who could recite songs and fragments of stories in Mende and Vai, and who could do simple counting in their

fragments of stories in rhyme and rai, and who could do simple counting in a Guinea/Sierra Leone dialect of Fula. In fact, all the African texts that Gullah* people have preserved are in languages spoken in Sierra Leone and along its borders.

The connection between the Gullah* and the people of Sierra Leone is a very special one. Sierra Leone has always had a small population, and Sierra Leone slaves were always greatly outnumbered on the plantations by slaves from more populous parts of Africa - except in South Carolina and Georgia. The rice plantation zone of coastal South Carolina and Georgia was the only place in the Americas where Sierra Leonean slaves came together in large enough number and over a long enough period of time to leave a significant linguistic and cultural impact. While Nigerians may point to Brazil, Cuba, and Haiti as places where Nigerian culture is still evident, Sierra Leoneans can look to the Gullah* of South Carolina and Georgia as a kindred people sharing many common elements of speech, custom, culture, and cuisine.

Excerpt from *The Gullah*, by Joseph Opala (1987)

Used by permission of the Avery Research Institute, College of Charleston, South Carolina

*NOTE: According to Lowcountry scholar Sherman Pyatt (1999), the word "Gullah" refers to the language and customs whereas the word "Geechie" refers to the people. We have retained the author's original wording in this excerpt.

S. Pyatt (1999) *A Dictionary and Catalog of African American Folklife of the South*.
New York: Greenwood Press.

Links of Interest



Some links will spawn another window, leaving the Project SuGAR page open in this window. Others will open in the target frame.

Historic Penn Center

Penn Center is the only Black Historical land mark on the National Register in the State of SC.



Gullah Language and Culture

Presented by CoastalGuide, Inc.



The Gullah Islands

An exhibit in the University of Delaware's Alphabet Superhighway program.



The Black Seminoles: Gullah Pioneer Freedom Fighters

Penn Center's 18th Annual Heritage Days Symposium, November 12-14, 1998.



I am Sapelo

Reflections of Sapelo Island, Ga. One of the Sea Island on the Georgia coast.



Gullah Celebration in the lowcountry and Beaufort Area

Learn about the upcoming Native Islander Gullah Celebration 2000.



Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition

Sponsored by the Afrikan Kultural Arts Network



In the Land of the Gullahs

An article from the Washington Post.



Gullah Geechee Sea Island Page

See what children in New Jersey and New York are discovering about the Sea Islands.



Gullah Gullah Island

Nickelodian Network's show for children: Hosted by Ron and Natalie Daise.

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Gullah tradition of storytelling alive and well

By **CAROL WEIR**
Packet staff writer

Trickster rabbits, lazy elephants, smart monkeys, cruel masters and God -- all these characters and many others enliven the folk tales that are passed down from one generation to another by Gullah storytellers in the Lowcountry.

The storytellers' oral tradition appears to be alive and well in native island communities, where some storytellers say their craft is experiencing a resurgence.

Anita Singleton-Prather, a Beaufort native and professional storyteller, said many Gullah stories have their roots in the slave culture. The tales often depict survival strategies that allowed blacks to endure and triumph over adversity, she said.

Singleton-Prather is a full-time storyteller who performs at schools, cultural events including Spoleto, and artists' workshops. The rights to her video tapes, "Tales from the Land of Gullah" and "Tales from the Land of Gullah For Kids," recently were purchased by PBS.

Singleton-Prather's stage persona, Aunt Pearlie Sue, is based on her grandmother. A floozy, a prophetess and a "Root Lady" who cures ailments with herbs also are part of her repertoire.

"I heard stories all the time growing up and didn't pay much attention to them," she said.

But when she saw how children reacted to her stories, she decided to pursue the art.

They listen with unwavering attention, reach out to touch her gingham skirt and shawl and sometimes leave muttering the morals of her stories to themselves, she said.

Singleton-Prather believes storytelling is making a comeback because people have become disenchanted with technology and want entertainment that is real. Also, the shame some blacks once felt about speaking the Gullah dialect is being replaced by pride in their heritage, she said.

Hilton Head Island native and storyteller Louise Cohen performed Sa4turday at a local celebration of National Freedom Day at Simmons Fish Camp. The event commemorated the 1865 signing

Summers Fish Camp. The event commemorated the 1863 signing of a constitutional amendment that outlawed slavery.

She entertained the audience with a tale in Gullah dialect about a lazy elephant and a clever monkey.

People in the audience laughed and slapped their knees as the monkey, with the help of God, manipulated his master into catching the elephant in the act of stealing the master's butter.

The community event was Cohen's first public performance as a storyteller. She said she was inspired to begin performing after seeing another storyteller at last year's National Freedom Day celebration.

"You are raised up with the stories. They are within me," she said.

Cohen said she plans to continue telling Gullah stories taught to her by her grandmother and aunts to her grandchildren and other children in the community.

Veronica Gerald, director of history and culture at the Penn Center on St. Helena Island, said storytelling often occurs spontaneously at informal gatherings of family and friends.

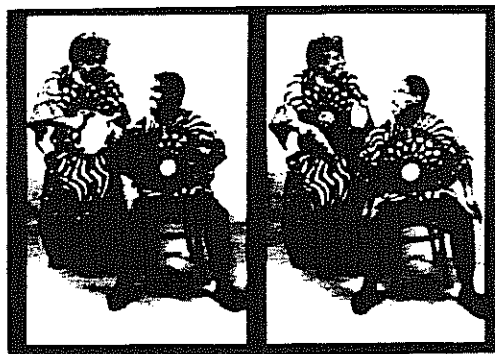
"Average, everyday people are storytellers," she said. "It's part of the culture."

Gerald said people who have a propensity for telling stories in a lively and exciting way often are recognized and encouraged early in life. Both men and women are Gullah storytellers, she said.

In West Africa, storytellers are called "griots," and the position is inherited or passed down to apprentices. Storytellers have the important function of reciting and remembering genealogy and historical information for their villages, Gerald said.

Staff writer Carol Weir can be reached at 706-8133 or cweir@islandpacket.com.

Gullah Home



THE GEORGIA SEA ISLAND SINGERS

- Celebrating Over 25 Years As International Performing Artists

Frankie & Doug Quimby

Offer You a History & Heritage Presentation
of African-American Culture

Continuing the tradition of their ancestors
with chants, work songs, games and gospel songs.

The Quimbys have toured throughout the world, including performances at the Olympic Games in Mexico and Lillehammer, sharing their songs and stories set against the history and mystique of the Georgia Sea Islands.

Their audiences include universities, schools, museums, conventions, conferences, as well as numerous radio and television appearances. The Quimbys performance exalts in remembering and keeping alive two centuries of African-American folk heritage.



The Georgia Sea Island Singers continue a tradition begun almost a century ago on St. Simons Island, Georgia, for the purpose of preserving the rich reservoirs of African-American culture, customs and the songs of the Gullah language spoken on the isolated islands of the Georgia Coast. These islands have been a vital storehouse of African-American history, because people living here were cut off from the melting pot on the mainland and retained a more pure version of the games and songs brought over from Africa. Songs and traditions documented by Lydia Parrish in her 1942 book "Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands" are performed today by the Quimbys for audiences all over the world.

The Quimbys travel throughout the world most of the year, performing Slave songs and dances, describing the world of their own Slave ancestors, leading children in games, demonstrating slave dances, singing Slave Songs *a capella*, and explaining what those songs meant in the context of the last century.



"I'm a firm believer that you can't know where you're going until you realize where you've come from" Frankie explains, "We have dedicated our lives to trying to preserve that rich heritage and culture that our ancestors handed down to us."

Slaves were not allowed to have musical instruments, so the Quimbys sing *a cappella* or with only the accompaniment of rhythm instruments, like the tambourine. Songs and dances took their impetus from the many things Slaves dared not say to the master, and from the things they dared not do.

"Hambone, Hambone, Where You Been" is one of Doug's most frequently requested songs. It is a memorable performance - his lightning quick hands elicit resounding sounds from his thighs, chest and mouth as his own body becomes a musical instrument.



Hear the musical, lyrical language of Gullah, a mixture of English and African dialect that bears the characteristic rapid enunciation of some African tribes.

Learn the art of hand-clapping and the choruses from the many call-and-response songs. The Quimbys offer an overview of Black History as they explain the meaning of the coded messages behind the songs and games, such as "The Old Tar River" (.aiff 38k) (.wav 38k) and the role they have played in the history of their people.

Dressed in brilliant dashikis, the Sea Island Singers share their stories along with a captivating history of the coastal islands of Georgia, bringing warmth and joy to this dynamic cultural experience.

FRANKIE SULLIVAN QUIMBY

Frankie Sullivan Quimby was born and raised on the Georgia Sea Islands. Her family took the name Sullivan after the Emancipation, one of the few families who can trace their ancestry back to a specific spot in Africa. The Sullivans, members of the Foulah Tribe, came from the town of Kianah in the District of Temourah in the Kingdom of Massina, on the Niger River.

Frankie, the oldest of thirteen children, is descended from slaves on the Hopeton and Altama Plantations in Glynn County. Many of her relatives still live in the Brunswick, Georgia area and on St. Simons Island.

Frankie is often quoted as saying "We are a strong people who know how to survive...and we want everybody to know where we came from."

DOUGLAS QUIMBY



Doug Quimby has been singing since the age of four. He was born in Baconton, Georgia in 1936, where his family were sharecroppers earning as little as \$9.25 for an entire year of work.

Douglas and his wife Frankie share a common musical heritage though they grew up miles apart. Doug's grandfather spoke in the Gullah dialect, indicating that many of his ancestors worked on the coastal plantations before being sold to inland landowners.

In 1963 Doug joined the Sensational Friendly Stars, a well-known gospel group, and six years later he became a member of the Georgia Sea Island Singers.

His rich, deep bass voice never ceases to amaze audiences as he leads them to join in singing sea chanteys and call-and-response songs. His story of Ebo Landing on St. Simons Island, where 18 tribesmen chose death over servitude, holds the audience spellbound. His powerful voice commemorates this tragedy in the song "Freedom, Freedom Over Me."

THE GEORGIA SEA ISLAND SINGERS

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 - Work Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands
 - Sea Chanties - Call & Response
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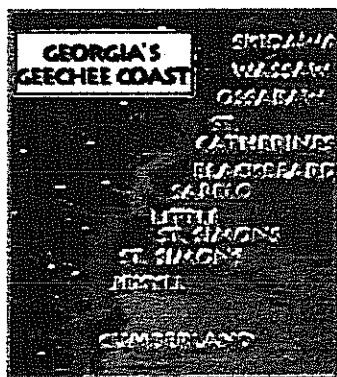
Email: quimbys@gacoast.com

Please Include Phone, Fax or Mailing Address with EMAIL!

THE GEORGIA SEA ISLAND SINGERS appearances and special events have included: Represented the U. S. A. at the Winter Olympics in Lillehammer; represented the Southern Coastal U. S. A. in West Africa at the invitation of the President of Sierra Leone; Represented State of Georgia at Statue of Liberty Centennial, New York; represented U. S. A. at Philadelphia Folk Festival; represented U. S. A. at International Children's Festival, Vancouver, Canada; Inauguration of President Jimmy Carter; White House Concert at invitation of President Ronald Reagan; Carnegie Hall, New York City; Olympic Games, Mexico; Mariposa Folk Festival, Toronto, Canada; Smithsonian Institute, Festival of American Folklore; Wolf Trap International Farm, Alexandria, Virginia; National Storytelling Festival, Jonesborough, Tennessee; Music Center of Los Angeles - Performing Arts Center; Southern Order of Storytelling, Atlanta Historical Society; Learning Circle Montessori School, Bozeman, Montana; Whaling Church, Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts; Prairie Home Companion, Minneapolis, Minnesota; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, North Carolina; Old Town School of Music, Chicago, Illinois; Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon; Harvard University, Boston, Massachusetts; Hudson River Revival Festival, New York City; East West Culture Center, Honolulu, Hawaii; National Association for Music Therapy, Conference - Atlanta, Georgia; Ohio Music Education Association, Conference - Dayton, Ohio; American Orff Schulwerk Association, National Conference.

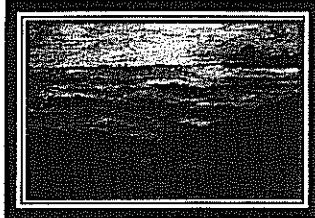


More Information on Georgia's Coastal Region:



Sapelo Island Sojourn
 St. Simons Island, Georgia
 Georgia's Golden Isles
 The Marshes of Glynn
 The Book Shop, Inc. - Local History A Specialty!
 High Tide's Guide to St. Simons
 "I Am Sapelo" by Cornelia Bailey
 The Weekender-Sapelo Island Lodging
 The Wallow-Sapelo Island Lodging
 Outdoor Adventure Guides
 Request More Info!
 Kingsland Low Country
 Coastal Georgia Destinations
 St. Marys, Georgia -
 Gateway to Cumberland Island

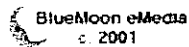
GOLDEN ISLES NAVIGATOR HOME PAGE



**The Official Georgia Sea Island Singers Web Page
Designed and Published by Sandy Jones**

"Passin' It Down"

Produced by Sandy Jones



URL: <http://www.gacoast.com/navigator/quimbys.html>



From Africa to South Carolina: the Sea Grass Basket Tradition

Sea Island basket weaving is a true African American artform whose origins date back to the end of the seventeenth century. This folk tradition was born out of the rise of South Carolinian rice cultivation during the 1680's. During this agricultural period, American slaves wove fanners, circular baskets approximately two feet in diameter, as tools used in winnowing rice. These slaves' knowledge of rice cultivation was attained from west Africa, a region that has contributed to rice cultivation since the first century A.D. For this reason, there is a great similarity that exists between baskets made in America and those made in west Africa. This African influence on rice growing and the fact that the majority of South Carolinian slaves came from Angola and Senegal have led historians to conclude that the roots from which Sea Island basket weaving has grown are planted in west Africa.



Rice Fanner

Although basket weaving and its techniques have changed very little over the past few centuries, there are some changes this folk artform has undergone that are worth noting. When baskets were first made on the Sea Islands, rush plant and white oak or palmetto were used to make a harder and stiffer product. Today, sea grass is the material basket weavers prefer when making the softer basket that currently comprises the majority of this folk culture. One other way basket weaving has changed is in the amount of creativity that is put into the final product. Baskets made in west Africa and during American slavery were very simple in form, while sea grass baskets of today are more decorative in style. In spite of these changes, basket weavers throughout the Sea Islands continue to carry on this folk tradition.



Basket Stand in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina

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