

For Immediate Release

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MONASTERY AND FREEDMAN SCHOOL DIG FINDINGS AT JANUARY 30 TALK

Findings from archeological digs at the ruins of the Benedictine Monastery and Freedman School on Skidaway Island will be presented on Thursday, January 30, by Laura Seifert, Savannah Archaeological Alliance Director, who led the effort. Seifert will give her illustrated talk at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 3 West Ridge Road on Skidaway at 4:45 p.m. The presentation is underwritten by Skidaway Audubon and there is no cost to attend.

The history revealed through nearly 12,000 artifacts found at the site dates from just after the Civil War. "The Freedman School is truly unique," said Seifert. "It is one of a very few Freedman Schools ever researched archaeologically and the only known archaeological research on Benedictines in the U.S."

With nearly 20 years of experience in archaeology, museums and higher education, Seifert has spent her career working on archaeology projects from the Canadian border to the Caribbean, with a focus on the southeastern U.S. She worked at both Historic Mount Vernon and Historic St. Mary's City before earning her masters degree from East Carolina University in 2006. Since then, this Savannah resident has been digging through her hometown's museums and squares and has taught at the Armstrong Campus of Georgia Southern University.

Her students at that campus were instrumental in the Skidaway dig which also included Benedictine Military School students, Savannah State University students and resident volunteers from The Landings community. When The Landings was undergoing initial development, nearly 50 years ago, part of the site was set aside in recognition of its archaeological importance and will never be built on.

Interpretive signage has been installed at the location on Priest Landing Drive as part of a long-term initiative to identify historic and natural sites within the community. The signage was funded by a grant from Landlovers to Skidaway Audubon's sustainability project, which sought certification of The Landings as a sustainable community by Audubon International, the first community to be certified in Georgia.

Bricks from the Freedman School recovered during the dig will also be displayed at the site. Other artifacts found, many of which will be shown in photographs during the January 30 presentation, are in the permanent collection of Georgia Southern University where they are available for research.

A dedication ceremony at the dig site will take place prior to the talk. Interested residents and guests are invited to gather at 4 p.m.

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Interpretive signage at Monastery and Freedman School site on Skidaway Island to be dedicated January 30th.

FREEDMEN SCHOOL STUDENTS and BENELECTINE MONKS, Learning in Great Contexts

After the Civil War, Savannah's Roman Catholic Diocese invited Benedictine monks to start schools for formerly enslaved children. Several were built, starting in Savannah. When yellow fever closed the site of Hope school, Abbot Wimmer sent Father Oswald Moormeier and Father Maurice Kaeder from St. Vincent Archabbey in Pennsylvania to Skidaway. The men arrived in March of 1877 and began building on the 17-acre Skidaway Place plantation, which the Catholic Diocese gifted to the Benedictine Order.

As Father Oswald began his work, three black monks joined the Skidaway mission. In September 1878 when classes began, the school had only 12 students. Father Oswald soon realized his plan for a manual school was flawed. He wrote, "I saw told in Savannah, that my plan of having a Manual Labor School for colored boys does not please the majority of the Negroes." The first reason is that most of them have a horror of farm work. The second cause seems to be that they want their boys to get an education which fits them for positions of clerks, bookkeepers, anything else but farmers.

In addition to the school, Father Oswald began draining the marsh to improve living conditions for everyone on the island. He planted eucalyptus in an effort to control mosquitoes, and thereby reduce malaria cases.

Learning through Archaeology

Recent archaeological excavations have shown that the school building was a two-story brick structure. The site was used for a variety of purposes, including a school, a residence, and a workshop. The school building was built in 1877 and was used until 1885. The site was abandoned in 1885 and was used for a variety of purposes, including a school, a residence, and a workshop. The school building was built in 1877 and was used until 1885. The site was abandoned in 1885 and was used for a variety of purposes, including a school, a residence, and a workshop.

