

OKEFENOKEE HERITAGE CENTER NEWSLETTER



**APRIL
MAY
JUNE
2026**

“Jackson’s Folly”

By Jessica Bennett

In the late nineteenth century, an ambitious plan was devised to tame one of the most mysterious landscapes in the American South—the Okefenokee Swamp. Located in southeastern Georgia, the vast wetland had long been regarded by locals as a place that resisted human control. Yet in 1889, investors and lawmakers believed they could transform it into a profitable enterprise. What followed became one of the most notable failures in the region’s history, remembered as “Jackson’s Folly.”

That year, the Georgia Legislature passed a bill incorporating the Suwannee Canal Company and authorizing the sale of the Okefenokee Swamp to the highest bidder. The swamp, covering hundreds of thousands of acres of marshland rich with valuable cypress timber, appeared to be an enormous economic opportunity. The land was eventually purchased by investors connected with the Hebard Timber Company, who hoped to harvest the massive cypress forests that thrived in the swamp.

To make this possible, the investors planned a bold engineering project: they would drain the swamp. If the water could be redirected out of the Okefenokee, the land could be logged, developed, and even converted to farmland. Captain Harry Jackson of Atlanta became the driving force behind the venture. A businessman with grand ambitions, Jackson either acquired a share in the original company or became one of its leading associates. He soon emerged as the financial leader of the effort to drain the Great Swamp and transport its timber to market.

Work began in 1891. Crews started digging a large canal in Charlton County that would run from the swamp toward the St. Mary’s River. The canal was intended to drain the Okefenokee by allowing its water to flow out toward the coast. The project required enormous effort. Dredge boats carved through dense wilderness, and workers cut canals and branches through miles of swamp. Railroads, sawmills, and logging camps were built to support the operation, and Jackson envisioned millions of feet of timber floating out of what he called the “Land of the Trembling Earth.” But the swamp soon revealed a problem the engineers had not anticipated. According to people familiar with the region, the Okefenokee’s water did not behave as expected. Local swampers had long claimed that some areas seemed almost bottomless and that the water and land were separated only by a thin layer of mud. Many even joked that the swamp “had a mind of its own.” Their observations proved closer to the truth than the engineers realized.

As the canal extended deeper into the swamp, workers began noticing something strange. Instead of draining toward the St. Marys River, the water began flowing the opposite direction. An elderly man who had worked as a cook on one of the dredge boats later explained that when the canal reached several miles into the swamp, the water “started to run back the other way.” Rather than emptying into the St. Marys River as planned, the current flowed toward the Suwannee River, many miles away.

Researchers later confirmed that this observation was correct. The natural drainage of the Okefenokee favored the Suwannee River basin, meaning the canal could not accomplish its intended purpose. Instead of draining the swamp, it merely redirected water through the canal system.

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OHC Calendar

APR	Steve Bean Exhibit	Art Gallery
Tues -	Line Dance Classes	6PM
1 -	OHC Board of Trustees	12PM
2 -	Learning Series ~ A I Class	5:30PM
7 -	OHC Genealogy Guild	6PM
14 -	OHC Photography Guild	6:30PM
16 -	SG Modern Quilt Guild	6PM
21 -	Black Heritage Committee	5PM
21 -	OHC Writer’s Group	4PM
24 -	OHC History Guild	6PM
26 -	Steve Bean Art Reception	2-4PM
27 -	OHC Art Guild	5:30PM
MAY	Okefenokee Swamp Art	Art Gallery
Tues -	Line Dance Classes	6PM
2 -	Okefenokee Folk Festival Sue Clark Day/Heritage Market	10AM-3PM
5 -	OHC Genealogy Guild	6PM
6 -	OHC Board Meeting	12PM
7 -	Learning Series ~ Camping 101	6PM
12 -	OHC Photography Guild	6:30PM
19 -	Black Heritage Committee	5PM
19 -	OHC Writer’s Group	4PM
21 -	SG Modern Quilt Guild	6PM
22 -	OHC History Guild	6PM
26 -	OHC Art Guild	5:30PM
JUNE	OHC Art Guild	Art Gallery
Tues -	Line Dance Classes	6PM
2 -	OHC Genealogy Guild	6PM
3 -	OHC Board of Trustees	12PM
6 -	Heritage Marketplace	10AM-1PM
6 -	America 250 Mural Paint Party	10AM-1PM
9 -	OHC Photography Guild	6PM
16 -	Black Heritage Committee	5:30PM
18 -	SG Modern Quilt Guild	6PM
23 -	OHC Art Guild	6PM
26 -	OHC History Guild	6PM
28 -	OHC Art Guild Art Reception	2-4PM

NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR:

I just have to brag on our volunteers! OHC would not be able to function without them. From our board members, our guild chairs and facility volunteers such as Steve Strickland, to our exhibit creators like Danny Barnes and office manager, Belinda Ursery. Thank you does not even cover it!! So many people praise OHC for the many activities we provide, and all I can say is, it's a team effort. What an amazing 1st Quarter we had at OHC! Leslie Ranew and I were blessed to attend the Okefenokee Day at the Capitol, and we hosted an amazing inaugural "We Love Literacy" OHC Book Festival facilitated by Elizabeth Pond. The Black History Art exhibit, curated by Bob Brown, was astounding and culminated in a special presentation in honor of Mr. Willie R. Character. Kristy Foreman, owner of Ellianos, partnered with us again to host the Chambers Rise & Shine and the quarter ended with another incredible Okefenokee Color Run. The Ware County High School BETA/NHS student volunteers have done a fabulous job at many of our events throughout the year. Did I mention we have some amazing VOLUNTEERS?? Too many to list here, but you know who you are, so.... THANK YOU!! *The Okefenokee Heritage Center, we're on the right track!!*

Carla Garrett Cornett, Executive Director



CHECK OUT WHAT'S HAPPENING AT OHC !

Thursday, April 2nd
5:30PM

AI for Small Businesses

Work Smarter, Grow Faster

with **Shane Bennett**

Okefenokee Heritage Center
1460 N. Augusta Ave

OHC Learning Series Presents
"Camping 101"
with local naturalist Jenny Sweat

Thursday, May 7th
6:00PM

3rd Annual Okefenokee Folk Festival

~ Sue Clark Day ~

Saturday, May 2, 2026 ~ 10AM - 3PM

Okefenokee Heritage Center
1460 N. Augusta Ave.

For more information call:
912-285-4260

Okefenokee Heritage Center
Presents

Steve Bean Youth Art Exhibit

On display the entire month of April
Reception April 26th ~ 2 - 4PM

Elementary to High School Students
Only Middle School & High School judged

Entries submitted to OHC by 2PM, March 28th

For more information:
912-285-4260
okeheritage@gmail.com

OKEFENOKEE HERITAGE CENTER

OHC America 250
Community Mural
Paint Party

Saturday, June 2nd
10am - 1pm

WAYCROSS AMERICA 250 GEORGIA

OHC GENEALOGY
GUILD

Join us every
1st Tuesday 6PM

Okefenokee Heritage Center

Special Events:



OHC Photo Guild Art Exhibition ~ Feb '26



"We Love Literacy" OHC Book Festival Authors ~ Feb '26



**Black History Month ~ Feb '26
Honoring Mr. Willie R. Character**



OHC Fiber Art Exhibition ~ March 2026

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Meanwhile, the enormous cost of the operation continued to rise. Maintaining dredge boats, canals, sawmills, and railroads required constant funding. Although large quantities of timber were harvested, the profits were quickly consumed by operating expenses. Before the company could solve these problems, tragedy struck. Captain Harry Jackson died in 1895, removing the driving force behind the project.

With Jackson's death, the dream of draining the Okefenokee collapsed. The costly enterprise came to an end, and the canal project was abandoned. In time, the entire effort became known as "Jackson's Folly," a reminder of the failed attempt to conquer the swamp.

Although the grand scheme failed, traces of the venture remained. Logging camps such as Camp Cornelia once stood along the canal, and abandoned dredge boats and canals lingered as silent witnesses to the effort. Over time, nature reclaimed much of the land, and the Okefenokee endured much as it had before.

In the end, the failed drainage project proved something many locals had long believed: the Okefenokee Swamp could not easily be subdued. What investors once saw as land waiting to be conquered remained a wild and resilient ecosystem—one that resisted even the most ambitious plans to change it.



11th Annual Okefenokee Color Run ~ America 250 2026 Winners

Okefenokee Heritage Center

1460 N. Augusta Avenue
Waycross, GA 31503
912-285-4260

www.okefenokeeheritagecenter.com

OHC Mission Statement:

The Okefenokee Heritage Center is a cultural art center and local history and train museum for all people, which seeks to promote an appreciation of the arts and an increased understanding of history and development of the Okefenokee region through its cultural and educational programs, collections, and exhibitions.

Proudly serving Atkinson, Bacon, Brantley, Charlton, Clinch, Coffee, Pierce & Ware.

A special thanks to ALL of our
OHC Members!!
Thanks to YOU....
“We’re on the Right Track”!

Invite a friend to join the Okefenokee Heritage Center

Individual	\$36
Family	\$60
Heritage Club	\$100
Sue Clark Society	\$200
Small Business	\$150
Business Sponsor	\$500
Corporate Sponsor	\$1,000
Corporate Partners	\$5,000+

* Join one of our many Guilds

All donations are tax deductible



OHC Board of Trustees 2025/26

Stephen Winge, Chairman
Dale Wiley, Vice Chair
Kristy Foreman, Treasurer
Christy Thurston, Secretary
Alan Jones, Past Chair
Mr. Joseph Johnson, Jr., Legal Counsel

RENT OUR SPACE

You can rent the facilities at the Okefenokee Heritage Center for parties, reunions, etc.

*Nancy King	Allen Allnoch
*Dr. S. William Clark	Vicki Kuhbander
*John Jordan	Steve Strickland
Frank Bartanowitz	Rosa Douglas
Susan Newman	Phyllis Perry
Jenny Sweat	Kristy Foreman
Keith Jeffers	Robert Brown
Jason Christmas	

* Denotes Life Member

Ex Officio Members:

Dr. Brandon Carter, RESA
Mary Kathryn Thrift, WSL
Greg Smith, City of Waycross

Honorary Member:

Zane Williams

Staff:

Carla Garrett Cornett, Executive Director
Belinda Ursery, Office Manager



Community Room	\$250
Community/Kitchen	\$300
Depot	\$300
The Venue	\$250
Warehouse/ Depot	\$400
Grounds	\$200

(Tables & Chairs available for rent)
For more information call:
912-285-4260

Visit us on Facebook
For Updates on Events



And on YouTube
For video interviews
okeheritage@gmail.com

