OKEFENOKEE HERITAGE CENTER NEWSLETTER

OKEFENOKEE HERITAGE CENTER
Waycross, GA

OCT NOV DEC 2026

Okefenokee Swamp Park Began With Meeting At Spears

By Larry Purdom , "By the Way… It Happened in Waycross" Vol II

Sometimes great achievements begin with small steps. Such it was that a movement to "do something" to open up the Okefenokee Swamp to visitors took hold in Waycross, or more precisely, downstairs at the Spears Drug Store on Elizabeth Street (what is there now)

The lasting legacy of the Hebard Company was to sell their hundreds of thousands of Okefenokee Swamp land to Federal government when the company ceased operations.

So it was that the Swamp became a Wildlife Refuge on Jan. 1, 1939.

But, having secured the security the Swamp now lay sheltered and alone. There was no organized way to visit the great swamp and no organization through which to do it.

"I went to the first meeting about the Okefenokee Swamp Park. I remember I was at my daddy's office, which was in the Bunn Building," remembers Mrs. Groszman, daughter of the late Dr. W.C. Hafford. "I was helping him close up, and he said, 'come on, let's go' and off we went to the Spears Drug Store."

There a group of civic-minded men would meet that would become eventually the Board of directors for the Okefenokee Samp park.

Since that time there have been other entrances opened up, including Stephen Foster State Park *(now known as Okefenokee State Park*) near Fargo, and Suwanee Canal Recreation Area *(now known as Okefenokee Adventures)* near Folkston, both operated by the State of Georgia and the Federal Government.

But way before these, a group of forward-thinking Waycross men met and formed the association that would open the Okefenokee Swamp park in 1946.

'Dad was always interested in the Swamp, he loved to go there, pushing the boat with a pole, 'Mrs. Groszman recalls, 'These civic-minded men met and wanted to do something with the Swamp, and also wanted to do something for Waycross'.

Mrs. Groszmans' mother had a long interest in photography, and she used her interest to take some early swamp photos that eventually sold at the Swamp park gift shop.

"Mom and dad loved to travel. They were curious about the world around them," recalls Lois. "Many times we traveled on roads without paving. You camped out before there were "tourist courts." By the time I was a senior in high school, I had been in 48 states and the Okefenokee Swamp."

That traveling bug came in handy when the group began designing the Swamp Park.



"Mom and dad, through our travels, had seen how others did things. They knew we had a special opportunity in the Okefenokee and wanted Waycross to succeed," she said.

Everybody chipped in, in this age before government grants. "They asked the people of Waycross to contribute $5. Almost everybody did, and all of them got their money back," she recalls. "The people responded beautifully. Of course, it took a lot of trips to Atlanta and Washington to get that road paved."

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OHC Calendar

OCT	**Judge Ben Smith Art Exhibit**	**Gallery**
Tues -	Line Dance Classes	6PM
3 -	OHC Heritage Marketplace	10am—1pm
6 -	OHC Genealogy Guild	6PM
7 -	OHC Board of Trustees	12PM
10 -	OSP 80th Ann. Field Day	10AM
13 -	OHC Photography Guild	6:30PM
15 -	OHC Quilt Guild	6PM
20 -	Black Heritage Committee	5:30PM
27 -	OHC Art Guild	5:30PM
NOV	**Veterans Day Exhibition**	**Gallery**
Tues -	Line Dance Classes	6PM
3 -	OHC Genealogy Guild	6PM
4 -	OHC Board of Trustees	12PM
7 -	Red, White & Blue Color Run	8AM
10 -	OHC Photography Guild	5:30PM
11 -	Veterans Day Celebration	11AM
12 -	Learning Series ~ Leslie Ranew	6PM
17 -	Black Heritage Committee	5:30PM
19 -	SG Modern Quilt Guild	6PM
26 -	Thanksgiving	5:30PM
DEC	**Nancy King Up & Coming Art**	**Gallery**
Tues -	Line Dance Classes	6PM
1-	OHC Genealogy Guild	6PM
2-	OHC Board of Trustees	12PM
5-	17th Ann. Christmas in the 'Cross	9AM-2PM
8-	OHC Photography Guild	6:30PM
15-	Black Heritage Committee	5:30PM
17-	SG Modern Quilt Guild	6PM
25 -	Merry Christmas	

NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR:

Happy 80th Birthday, Okefenokee Swamp Park!! On October 8, 1946 OSP Manager William Dodson, Governor Ellis Arnall and thousands of guests celebrated the opening of the Okefenokee Swamp Park. We are so blessed to have such and amazing natural wonder in our area. Let's take a moment to look around our beautiful terrain and appreciate the variety of plants and animals we take for granted daily. Not to mention our rich cultural heritage. In honor of the Okefenokee Swamp Park's 80th Birthday, Exhibit Committee Co-Chairs, Danny Barnes and Leslie Renew have put together and amazing Swamp Exhibit in our Rotating Exhibit Room at OHC. In the exhibit you will see historic displays as well as movies and music inspired by the swamp. And of course a spotlight on Luther Swift, Chris Trowell, Don Berryhill and Johnny Hickox who spent their lives keeping the swamp history alive. We want to thank South Georgia State College and the Okefenokee Swamp Park for the loan of many of the swamp historic items included in the exhibit. *The Okefenokee Heritage Center, we're on the right track!!*



Carla Garrett Cornett, Executive Director

Memorial Satilla Health

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GATX

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CHECK OUT WHAT'S HAPPENING AT OHC !





OHC will host a SWAMP ART EXHIBIT at the Okefenokee Swamp Park







Special Events:.



Gregory Newson's Art Presentation ~ July '26



Summer Art Camp ~ Jorah Mitchell Teacher ~ July '26



Don Yaun Art Exhibit ~ Clark Home Painting Presentation Aug '26



Judge Ben Smith Art Competition Winners ~ Sept '26

(Continued from page 1)

They knew they needed a showman, so they went to Florida and got Silver Springs' Dick Pope to come help them open. A boardwalk and wooden observation tower were built, and a boat dock, but without any boats yet.

"Dick Pope was the first manager I believe. My recollection is that his wife didn't like the Swamp one bit. We thought it was beautiful. He left and Mom and I took over the gift shop there. We sold Mom's photographs of the Swamp."

Then it was time to get the word out.

"Liston Elkins was devoted to getting the Swamp Park as much publicity as possible. He took Will Cox to New York City. Will never met a stranger you know. It seems like only yesterday."

Dr. Hafford died in 1950 after devoting his adult life to the health care and well-being of his fellow Swamp Country citizens.

"I just wish he had lived a little longer to see the Swamp Park grow," adds Mrs. Groszman.

Happy 80th Birthday to the Okefenokee Swamp Park!!



Chamber of Commerce ~ Business After Hours ~ Sept '26



Danny Barnes & Leslie Ranew
Setting up the OSP 80th Exhibit



ELVIS RETURNS Sept '26
Jordan Poole, Tribute Artist
(photo by AHA Photography)

Okefenokee Heritage Center

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Waycross, GA 31503
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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

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RENT OUR SPACE

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

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

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