



Volume #11

Spring 2022

Friends of Hofwyl–Broadfield Plantation Newsletter

Visiting and Programming

The historic site is open Tuesday-Sunday with the tour of the historic house beginning on the hour. If you have any questions about visiting, please call the office staff at 912-264-7333. This park is maintained by the state of Georgia. Bill Giles, Site Manager, can be reached at bill.giles@dnr.ga.gov.

Easter Scavenger Hunt (March 15, 2022-April 24, 2022) Receive a prize at the end after you visit the interesting locations on the historic site. Map is provided at the office.

Plein Air Art Event April 2, 2022, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Ghosts and Legends Tour of the Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation: call the office to register.

Date	Time	Date	Time
February 26, 2022	5:30 p.m.	March 18, 2022	6:30 p.m.
March 5, 2022	5:30 p.m.	April 1, 2022	6:30 p.m.
March 12, 2022	6:30 p.m.	April 9, 2022	6:30 p.m.



New for Spring 2022
Mighty Oaks From Tiny Acorns Grow:
Hofwyl's Famous Trees

Date	Time
April 16, 2022	2:00 p.m.
June 11, 2022	11:00 p.m.

This will be an outdoor hike. Our site manager will show the visitors the live oaks in various stages of development. Information on the oaks importance and uses will be discussed. Imagine all the hurricanes the oaks have seen and lived through. Please call the office to register for this event. The informational walk will take about an hour.



New Officers in 2022



Mason Stewart passes the president's gavel to Steve Lanter at the January Friends of Hofwyl– Broadfield Plantation meeting on the first Tuesday of the year. The other new officers include: Vice President– Linda Hlozansky, Secretary– Jean Earle McConnell, Treasurer– Gail Johnson, Social Media– Stephanie Giles, Publicity– Liz DeMato, Programming– Mason Stewart and Jack McConnell, Immediate Past President– Mason Stewart, Newsletter– Linda Hlozansky and Steve Lanter, Historic Site Manager– Bill Giles, Trustee– Gordon Strother. The friends meet the first Tuesday each month at 5:00 p.m. If you are interested in joining our group, please attend the next meeting.



**Spring Family Fun At
Hofwyl–Broadfield Plantation
March 15th–April 24th**

Come join the artists for the 10th Annual
Plein Air Art
Event
on
Saturday
April 2, 2022



Photos by Troup Nightingale



The Old Man of Sapelo: Bilali

By S.T. Lanter



Bilali as an old man.

Glynn and McIntosh Counties were blockaded by the British during the War of 1812 as a part of London's traditional strategic imperative to strangle an enemy's trade with the outside world. With the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo large numbers of veteran troops and ships were transferred to the west to finally extinguish the troublesome, faraway, 'brush-fire' war in North America. Even then, both counties were relatively tranquil backwaters in the larger struggle.

The Royal Navy squadron, under the overall command of Rear Admiral George 'the Ruffian' Cockburn [pronounced co-burn], sought gainful employment for his expanded command. Always pursuing a policy of constantly giving the Americans "a good drubbing," 'the Ruffian' sent out increased numbers of ship borne raiding parties ashore to keep their American enemies off balance. The strategic hope being to force the American government to redeploy troops from the Canadian frontier to defend its own long, vulnerable coastline. One such party visited Broadfield in March of 1815.

The Savannah Republican published an account of the depredation:

Sketch of British Plunder and depredation committed on St. Simon's Island (Geo) by Cockburn's Banditti.

Mrs. [Maria] Brailsford's House [Broadfield] broken open and robbed by boats crew under command of a lieutenant Grant--some of Mrs. Brailsford's and Mrs. [Camilla] Troup's ... [clothes were stolen]

Admiral Cockburn was likely the most hated man in America in the aftermath of his burning of Washington. One resident of Virginia offering a reward of \$500 for each of Cockburn's ears and \$1,000 for the admiral's head—upon delivery. Long after the war ended a rumor made the rounds (it proved to be untrue) that 'the ruffian' was going to arrive on a visit—a lynch-mob quickly formed to greet the admiral.

Cockburn's fleet briefly captured and occupied St. Simons Island, Cumberland Island and St. Mary's. The islanders received the British officers warmly, for the islanders were permitted to come and go on their personal business unhindered. Royal Marine Lt. John Fraser and his brother William Fraser, the fleet's distinguished surgeon courted and married local planter's daughters; remaining behind on St. Simons after the British fleet sailed away. Planter George Baillie observed that the Royal Marines were "real gentlemen" not like the Naval officers—such as Cockburn who had long been an ardent abolitionist—who were "*seducing the slaves*" by following Admiral Cockburn's instructions to "*... come back with such negroes as may be willing to join our standard.*" Most planters acquiesced and suffered their losses in silence, however one planter was prepared to fight to protect his property. Ophelia Troup wrote in her 1904 narrative that:

Mr. Thomas Spalding of Sapelo [Island], with his large family and great possessions in land and negroes, never left the island, the British fleet being in the sound. They were never molested.

In a strategic but relatively unimportant backwater where 'Cockburn's Banditti' raided and plundered at will why did they ignore Thomas Spalding's rich plantation on Sapelo Island? Ophelia never says why Sapelo was unmolested by the British 'Banditti.' Cornelia Walker Bailey [a descendent of Bilali], who grew up on Sapelo Island, provides one possibility, recounting tales she heard from her parents and grandparents about the: '*Old Man*,' as he was known to her.

other men ... [were] called "old man," ... but they used his name as part of the title.... They didn't simply say "The Old Man" about anyone but this one person and I could tell by the way they said it that he didn't need a first name.... He was Bilali. ... a legendary figure. He carried himself different ..., and he kept his family apart ... [too]. Bilali was a Mohammedan, a Muslim....

[W]hen the British were invading the islands off the Georgia coast, back during the War of 1812, Thomas Spalding decided to arm his slaves. He wanted them to be able to fight off the British if they came. He gave Bilali firearms and told him to train the slaves how to use them. He did, and the British never came ... [Most slave owners wouldn't have dared to arm their slaves.] Bilali must have been absolutely trustworthy; Spalding must have respected him.

But who was Bilali? Muhammad Bilali, or Bul-Allah as he was also known, was born in the Fouta-Djallon Empire to a merchant/warrior caste of the Fula Tribe in Timbo, Guinea [now Sierra Leon], West Africa circa 1779. As a member of this elite caste, he was bred to despise manual field labor but was an expert in the cultivation of rice. He received, at least some, education as he was able to read and write in Arabic. His education was possibly training for Islamic clergy. As a young warrior he was captured in a battle on the frontier of 'Fouta-Djallon,' enslaved, sold overseas when he was 13 or 14 years old. Purchased by a Dr. Bell, an American Tory refugee, resettled by the British, in Nassau, Bahamas. Bilali labored on Dr. Bell's Middle Caicos plantation for ten years. While enslaved there he married his four wives (Fatima, Phoebe, Hester, and Margaret) and sired 12 sons and 7 daughters. Thomas Spalding purchased him in 1802, and transported him to his plantation on Sapelo Island, Georgia, along with his wives and daughters.

Bilali was "a proud leader of men and an equally proud leader of Islam." Spalding, as Dr. Bell before him, recognized Bilali's leadership abilities appointing him as the lead 'driver' supervising between 400-500 slaves. Spalding respected Bilali's abilities so much that he saw no need to hire a white overseer. Also, it is interesting that Spalding, in the deeply Christian south, permitted Bilali and his other Muslim slaves the unhindered practice of Islam.

During the War of 1812 the British failed to land on Sapelo Island because, as many people believed, word reached them that Bilali and over eighty armed slaves with muskets awaited them. The threat of armed slaves fighting the British raiders was not a bluff. Thomas Spalding requested Georgia Governor Peter Early provide arms and ammunition to equip his slaves to repel the threatened British raid

.75-80 muskets, flints, powder and shot for Spalding's defense force.

This act by Spalding, illustrates not only the high regard and faith that Spalding had for Bilali, but Spalding's influence in Georgia--the only colony that did not allow blacks to fight in the Revolutionary War. For slave uprisings were a constant fear, memory of the Stono Rebellion, near Charleston in 1739, still resonated.

Ophelia says in her narrative that Spalding and his family remained on Sapelo Island to the end of the war. But there is strong evidence that he and his family fled the island, leaving Bilali in complete charge until the war ended. Bilali informed Spalding that he would not violate his master's trust, but demurred about Spalding's non-Muslin slaves, proclaiming, *"I will answer for [the loyalty of] every Negro of the true faith [Islam], but none of the CHRISTIAN DOGS you own."*

Upon Spalding's return at the end of the war everything on Sapelo Island was in order. Which begs a number of questions.

Would Bilali have fought? It is difficult to speculate on what might have occurred, but everything in his background, his education, his warrior mindset, his self-pride, suggests that he would have and likely successfully.

Why didn't Bilali accept Admiral Cockburn's offer of freedom and transportation to the Bahama's in exchange for military service to the crown? Perhaps he wasn't aware of Admiral Cockburn's proclamation. Or more likely he was suspicious, for slavery still existed in the Bahamas, as he himself had been enslaved there.

Were the British raiders impressed that under Bilali's leadership the fight would have been intense? Did they choose easier, safer pickings elsewhere instead? The fact that Sapelo Island was untouched during the war, when 'the banditti' broke into nearby Broadfield, suggests this was so.

Bilali was a proud man, from a prideful tribe, self-assured, and charismatic. He impressed all who knew him. Georgia Bryan Conrad, writing in 1901, recalled a visit to Sapelo Island during her childhood and an elderly slave named Bilali.

On Sapelo Island, near Darien, I used to know a family of Negroes who worshipped They were all tall and well-formed, with good features. They conversed with us in English, but

They conversed with us in English, but foreign tongue that no one else understood. The head of the tribe was a very old man called Bi-la-li. He always wore a cap that resembled a Turkish Fez. The Negroes held themselves aloof from others as if they were conscious of their superiority.

Bilali died on Sapelo Island in 1857.

Behavior Cemetery

Circa 1805

Sapelo Island, Georgia



Photo from vanishingcoastalgeorgia.com

He was buried in this cemetery on Sapelo with his Quran and prayer rug in the Muslim fashion with his feet pointed east. Allegedly most of the other people were also buried with their feet to the east.

Pick up a copy soon!

It is a very special addition to the gift shop. The book is so much more than a cookbook, it is a history book. It describes the methods for preserving meats before refrigeration, contains recipes for spirits, recipes for cleaning supplies, and medical advice! Our coastal history is in this book. Pick up a copy for you and a friend.

Meals & Memories of Hofwyl Plantation



Friends of Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation
Brunswick, Georgia