

March 2026

Yesterday & Today



NEWSLETTER OF THE LOWNDES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Blue Springs in the early 20th century

Editor's Note

Perhaps like no other season, spring reminds us of the constant of change. Blossoms spread, then fall off their stems. The flurry of preparations for Passover and Easter come and go as quickly as the holidays themselves. A sun tilts higher in the sky, replacing the darkness of long winter nights.

History follows a similar pattern. Events occur and then are recorded. Technology becomes obsolete as quickly as it's adapted. Relics that once served vital purposes find new homes under glass, preserved by human hands for human beings not yet born. Far from dormant, it finds renewal in the present moment through the actions of those invested in its meaning and importance, now and in the future.

The Society and Museum have seen their share of flux these past few months as well. The Museum welcomed new staff members and interns (pages 4 and 5). Staff expanded their professional horizons and continued the work of keeping the Museum organized and updated; sadly, it also lost one of its longtime champions and supporters (page 2). The cycle of life—organic, unpredictable, full of ups and downs—asserted itself as predictably as azalea buds bursting forth and pollen cascading down onto cars.

As we find ourselves once again managing the uncertainty of global events and technological advances moving faster than a rabbit across a sunlit meadow, let us take solace in the past (page 3). Like Blue Springs, a deep dive into history acts as a balm for souls weary from the pressures of modernity. May the pages of this issue bring you comfort, respite, and above all hope.

Amy Faeskorn

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Executive Director's Corner

Spring always seems to bring a sense of movement and renewed energy to the Museum. After the quiet of winter, we begin to see more visitors coming through the doors, students visiting on field trips, and new projects taking shape.

February was a good example of that rhythm. Our new Museum Assistant Dustin and I attended the annual conference of the Georgia Association of Museums in Kennesaw, where we had the chance to connect with colleagues from around the state and gather some useful ideas. Even with some cold weather and ice warnings that kept attendance down, it was a valuable trip.

In February we greeted a total of 78 visitors, including a 5th grade class from St. John Catholic School and a senior group from the Valdosta Housing Authority. It's also been encouraging to see researchers making use of our resources. Members of The Crescent have been visiting to work on a grant project, and an archaeological research team recently spent time studying historic maps related to a proposed extension of the Inner Perimeter. We were also glad to welcome Dr. Willie Houseal, who stopped by to take a look at our 200 Years of Lowndes County exhibit.

Dustin and I recently visited with Brian Shaw at the Berrien County Historical Foundation and Museum, which has received several awards. Conversations like that are always helpful and remind us that small museums across South Georgia are working toward the same goal—preserving the stories that matter to our communities.

Much of the work at museums happens quietly behind the scenes and ours is no exception. Dustin has been reorganizing our digital drive and collections storage, improving shelving, identifying uncatalogued items, working on designs for our exhibits and promotional materials, and cleaning up countless duplicate files.

At the same time, this season has given us a moment to reflect on the past and those who have made a lasting impact on our Museum family. We were deeply saddened by the passing of Lilla Kate Hart, a longtime trustee and devoted supporter of our work. Many of you will remember her genial presence at our events and programs. Lilla Kate made countless contributions to the museum over the years, and she had a true passion for preserving our local history. She was always a kind source of encouragement and will be deeply missed.

I invite you to come and see what's happening at the Museum sometime soon, and thank you for being part of what we do.

Renate Miller



Lilla Kate Hart
1932-2026

To make a donation in memory of Mrs. Hart,
or any other loved one, visit

lowndescountymuseum.com

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Familiar Waters: The Legend—and Legacy—of Blue Springs

by Joscelyn Godwin



Resort-goers relaxing at Blue Springs in its heyday

Every era has its pleasures and recreations, many having to do with water. The names of Bath in England and Spa in Belgium record habits that go back at least to ancient Roman times: drinking and bathing in waters of some special quality. Such was the cool, spring-fed pool near the Withlacoochee River, halfway between Valdosta and Quitman.

The native inhabitants may have known of this “Blue Spring” long before its rediscovery in the 1830s. From 1847 a hamlet called Springville grew up around it, complete with store, school, and church. [6] Residents were served by the Valdosta-Quitman stagecoach, which crossed the river at that point, while summer visitors could pay 50 cents for a round trip from Quitman in a horse-drawn omnibus.[7]

In 1861 the Atlantic and Gulf Railroad reached Thomasville, and kept running through the war years. It brought a wave of settlers fleeing from the battlegrounds and postwar devastation in the East. [12] In time these prospered, and became the day-trippers and vacationers from the growing cities in Brooks and Lowndes Counties. For Valdostans it was a 15 cent journey. [11] In the 1890s the Spring’s enterprising proprietor, Colonel E. C. Wade, cleared the area of undergrowth, dug drainage ditches, and built a twelve-room hotel and several cottages for summer rental. [3]

Blue Springs now functioned as a modest but much-loved resort, offering “as pleasant a week as can be spent at a more fashionable resort at three times the expense.” [3] A new steel and concrete bridge spanned the Withlacoochee. [5] A memoir records that in the late teens and early 1920s, “every church in Quitman united for a Sunday School picnic the second Friday in June. Such a crowd you never saw with swimming, ball games and long tables spread with tons of food under the trees.” [9] The cottages were usually reserved from one year to another. The writer’s family paid \$15 for two weeks in the two-story cottage with a big screened porch. Dances were held in a pavilion every Friday and Saturday night, bringing in young people from Valdosta, Thomasville, and all the neighboring towns. Workers from the Quitman and Valdosta cotton mills were treated to barbecues there. [4] High schools would hold their commencement picnics, three schools sometimes arriving on the same date. [10] The ensuing chaos can well be imagined.

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During these halcyon years the spring obliged with a strong flow of its mineral-laden waters. According to a State Geologist's report in 1908, "It seems to be the outlet of a large subterranean stream, which ascends, with considerable force, through a large opening." [9] On the expert's own visit in November, 1903, the estimated flow was about 15 million gallons a day. But a few years later, during an unusually dry season, it dried up completely.

Blue Springs' popularity as a summer resort began to fade in the 1930s. Private automobiles brought new vacation opportunities. A fire consumed some of the buildings.[11] The water-flow fell to a trickle. [4] Apparently it was the massive extraction of groundwater by a growing population that had lowered the water table. [10] A new highway, today's Route 84, bypassed the area, and the old Valdosta-Quitman road is now cut off. Those who have ventured in search of Springville find at best a frog-pond, with no relic of the rumored church, store, hotel or cottages: only ghosts, perhaps. For close by is the notorious Spook Bridge; but that is another story.

Sources: *Valdosta Times*, Apr. 16, 1887 [1]; July 1, 1893 [2]; Oct. 5, 1895 [3]; July 6, 1907 [4]; Apr. 12, 1919 [5]; June 29, 1975 [6]; Unattributed newsclipping, 1878 [7]; LCHS Newsletter V/8-9-10, Summer 1976, p. 4 [8, incorporating sources 1, 2]; WWALS reprints "A Preliminary Report on the Underground Waters of Georgia" by S. W. McCallie, State Geologist, Geological Survey of Georgia, Bulletin no. 15, 1908, p. 58 [9]; Beth Williams Powers, "Blue Springs Blues," unsourced essay on a realtor's site for property on Blue Springs Lane [10]; "Blue Springs was the Place to Go," from Albert S. Pendleton, Jr., *Way Back When* (LCHS, 2004), vol. III, pp. 200-201 [11]; website on Atlantic and Gulf Railroad [12].

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Keeping educational wanderlust alive

Museum Assistant Dustin Otey brings an unconventional background, passion for learning, and vision for the future to his new role

Dustin Otey has always held a fascination for understanding the world and following his interests wherever they lead him.

"Growing up, we watched a lot of movies as a family. Whenever they took place in the past, I would ask my dad what was happening at that time," he recalls. "I would go and pull the encyclopedias off the shelf and see what I could find out. I've always kind of been that way."

Otey's roots in South Georgia run deep: both of his parents grew up in Albany, Georgia and he recently traced their marriage license to Homerville, unearthing some surprises in the process. "I just found out the last names I expected to see on the document weren't there," he says. "So I'll be curious to know where this goes next!"

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Museum Assistant Dustin Otey

After his father's honorable discharge from the Army, the family settled in Hahira, where Otey attended elementary and middle school. Independent-minded from a young age, he opted to be homeschooled throughout high school, and has followed a self-directed path of growth and exploration ever since. "When I was a teenager, the Internet was just taking off. It was kind of in its 'wild west' phase," he laughs. "But that really enabled me to plan my own lessons and make my own discoveries, to figure out what I wanted to study on my own." He went on to take several positions in a variety of industries over the next several years, from flinging pizzas at Domino's to learning graphic design at a sign shop, where he was also exposed to layout and installation methods along with all aspects of screen printing.

When a friend told him about the opportunity to work at the museum, he was intrigued. "In my previous jobs, once I thought of a system of rules, I was able to make things work," he says. "So far, I've been able to do that here as well." Since he began as Museum Assistant in January, he's worked on redesigning the Doc Holliday exhibit, supported the VSU interns updating the Black History and Remerton exhibits, input acquisitions into the digital database, updated collection inventory, and created fillable forms to request resource access online rather than in person. His long-term goal is to foster younger generations' engagement with local history. "I think making materials more hands-on and interactive will help," he notes. "Straddling that line between education and experience definitely seems like the way in."

When not making music or playing video games, Otey enjoys travel—favorite past trips include England, Spain, and Denmark—and the many lessons he's learned from visiting far-flung places have left a lasting impression on him. "That's what's so great about museums," he observes. "They're a kind of international currency. It doesn't matter where you're from when you enter one, and I want the visitors we welcome to have that same feeling when they enter ours."

Thanks a Mellon

With the help of generous grant funding, the Museum welcomes a team of Valdosta State University student interns

The Museum is pleased to welcome four undergraduate history majors, one geology major, and one graduate student from Valdosta State University (VSU) as interns for the 2025-2026 academic year.

Made possible by a \$2.45 million grant from The Mellon Foundation,



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VSU student interns Lucas Little, Savannah Osheim, Jalen Mercer
Not pictured: Hunter Norman, Steve Ellis

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the history majors are each paid for their hours and are eligible for a \$5,000 scholarship upon completion of the program, while the fourth internship is supported by alternative funding.

Valdosta native and junior Lucas Little is enjoying the opportunity to survey the Museum's collection and brainstorm ways in which to share his findings on a broader scale. He's begun posting photos and snippets of information on the Museum's social media accounts. Currently at work on a short video about the Eager shotgun in the Museum's collection, he's also planning to start a YouTube channel. His favorite topic to date? "All those hidden vacation spots, like Blue Springs, Barbers Pool, and Twin Lakes."

Born and raised in Valdosta, VSU junior Savannah Osheim has been focusing her efforts on Black history, assisting with the development of that exhibit and unearthing important details about the civil rights era. "I'm really fascinated by the period in the '60s when Valdosta State College was fully integrated, and Skip McDonald, the first Black homecoming queen," she says. "People need to know how the big events in history played out in their communities."

Senior Jalen Mercer grew up in Savannah and knew he wanted to study history from the time he was in 6th grade; he's been assisting Museum Assistant Dustin Otey with archival inventory. "The other day I was looking at Confederate currency," he says. "Most of it wasn't 'real' money, just promissory notes. It's always so interesting to see things like that up close and not just read about them. Mercer feels strongly that his generation needs to know and learn about the past. "It's important to know how we got to where we are. This place is a repository of that."

Though not participating through the Mellon grant, geology major and junior Steve Ellis is also putting in hours at the Museum, working on a project to integrate several of the collection's 1967 aerial maps into an online database. "The energy, curiosity, and perspectives of these young people are always a welcome part of the museum," says Executive Director Renate Milner. "They're helping us get so much accomplished."

The Society depends on the generosity of its patrons around the world
to carry out our mission.

Thank you to all contributors.
received December 3, 2025 - March 11, 2026

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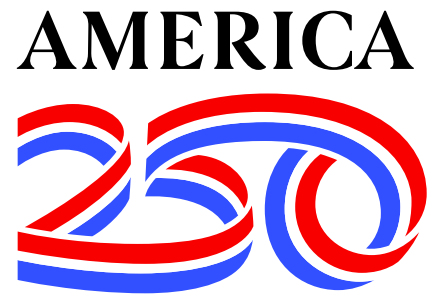
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South Georgia in 1776

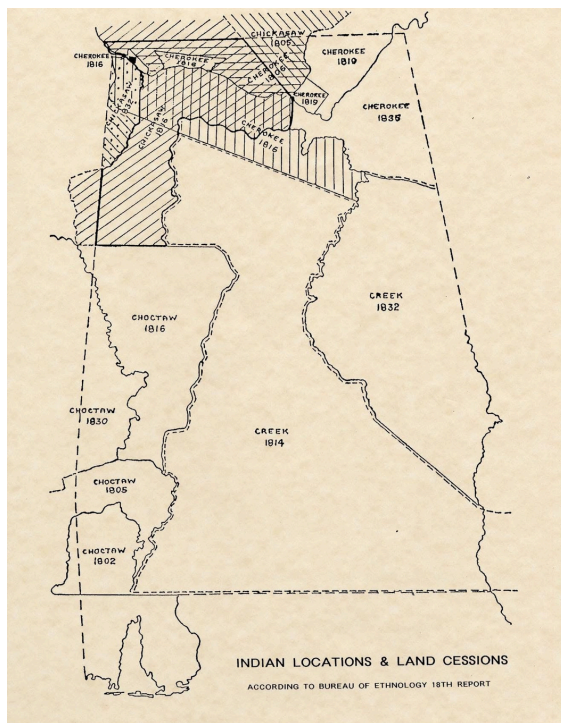
A virgin territory largely inhabited by the Muscogee, South Georgia was a land still in its infancy a year after the shot heard round the world

In honor of the America250 celebration, each issue of this year's Yesterday & Today will look back on a period in Lowndes County's past that aligns numerically with the sesquicentennial.



As the ink was drying on Declaration of Independence up in Philadelphia, the Muscogee—a collective of tribes from the Ocmulgee River west to Alabama, named “Creek” by early colonists—still very much dominated the population of the area that would eventually become the state of Georgia. In the late 1700s, they still outnumbered both European colonial settlers and enslaved Africans, and had formed strategic alliances with other tribes to maintain safety and peace. They continued to engage in trade with the colonists and managed to largely steer clear of the activities of the American Revolution, the impact of which was much more greatly felt in cities such as Augusta and Savannah.

The establishment of the United States of America was a watershed moment for tribes throughout the South. Forced to cede their lands east of the Ocmulgee River in a series of treaties through the late 18th and early 19th century, most of the remaining Muscogee had been completely removed from the region by 1825, the year of Lowndes County's incorporation—changing forever the future of native peoples as well as the social and economic landscape of the fledging nation.



20 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, South Georgia was still largely Native American land

Disappointingly, very little evidence of the Muscogee culture and way of life remains in this part of south Georgia. Although the Lowndes County Historical Society and Museum holds in its collection several Indian artifacts discovered in the region that can be dated back hundreds of years ago, none have been directly tied to the exact time of the nation's founding.

In the absence of concrete, tangible evidence of exactly how life looked for the county's inhabitants in 1776, we're compelled to reflect with solemnity and reverence on the mystery and complexity of early American history as well as on the many contributions Native Americans have made to the growth and prosperity of our country as we know it today.

The next installment in this series will focus on life in Lowndes County in 1876.

Know something about that time you'd like to contribute? Email the editor at amy@faeskorn.com.

For more information about America250, visit america250.org.

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New members are always welcome

Upcoming Member Meetings

May 21, 2026, 4 p.m.

September 15, 2026, 4 p.m.



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