The Historic Buildings of Sapelo: 
A 200-Year Architectural Legacy

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The architectural heritage of Sapelo Island goes 
back two hundred years and two of its structures 
claim a place among the most lasting—and 
historic—of the surviving buildings of tidewater 
Georgia. The two Sapelo structures that are the 
subject of this paper, the Long Tabby sugar mill 
and the South End (Coffin-Reynolds) mansion, 
were two centuries old in 2009 and 2010, 
respectively.

When Thomas Spalding began acquiring land 
on Sapelo Island in 1802 he immediately began 
implementing his vision of establishing a 
plantation empire. Perhaps more importantly for 
the purposes of the present discussion is that 
Sapelo enabled Spalding to solidify his unique 
concept of permanence. The greatest testimony to 
this philosophy is Spalding’s application and 
adherence to the use of tabby as his preferred 
architectural technique. This approach evolved 
into the two structures he built in 1809-1810 
which have survived well into the 21st century—

his prototype sugar works on Barn Creek and the 
patriarchal residence on the south end of the 
island. These two structures thus rank among 
the oldest, perhaps the oldest, surviving buildings 
in McIntosh County.¹

Long Tabby Sugar Mill

The old tabby sugar mill on Sapelo, known 
through several generations as the “Long 
Tabby”, is arguably the oldest standing 
commercial building still in use in McIntosh 
County. It clearly pre-dates all of the existing 
tabby structures, or remains of structures, in the 
county since the builder of Long Tabby, Thomas 
Spalding, established the paradigm in a tabby 
architectural renaissance in tidewater Georgia 
early in the 19th century. In 2009, the Long 
Tabby was 200 years old, being the first of 
several tabby buildings constructed by Spalding 
in McIntosh County.² Additionally, Spalding 
was the prevailing influence for dozens of other 
tabby structures on the coast from Hilton Head 
to Amelia Island. Rebuilt at least twice in its two 
centuries of existence, the original tabby walls of 
Long Tabby remain intact, though they are now 
covered with protective stucco applied ninety 
years ago in a restoration of the building by 
Howard Coffin during his ownership of the

Spalding’s Long Tabby sugar mill.
island.

Adjacent to the north end of the structure are the crumbling tabby ruins of Spalding’s cane press, symbolic of his being the first agrarian in Georgia to plant cane and manufacture sugar on a commercial basis.

Actually, the Long Tabby’s reason for being is attributable to Spalding’s own resourcefulness, exemplified in his application of experimental techniques to his agricultural operations on Sapelo. Spalding was a man of considerable wisdom and innovation, the consummate scientific farmer of his generation. Spalding, despite not having anything remotely approaching the modern technology that we take for granted in our own era, thoroughly understood the ecological ramifications of his region. He thus utilized to the maximum the environmental circumstances in which his life, and life-ways, were placed—salt air, soil conditions, tidal hydrology, the seasonal vagaries of local weather. Thus, rather than approach Mother Nature adversatively, he let the coastal ecosystem work for him in his planting profession, including all its extraneous aspects. This philosophic utilization of his landscape enabled Spalding to become perhaps the leading antebellum agrarian of Georgia. Paradoxically, outside of a central Georgia county being named for him, his contributions to his state have gone virtually unnoticed and unappreciated over the last century and a half.

In 1805, three years into his ownership of Sapelo South End, Spalding planted 100 acres of sugar cane as an experiment. He saw that his staple, a Jamaican variety of cane, could thrive in the porous sandy soils of the Georgia coast, and consequently set about designing and building his mill complex to produce a high quality of sugar. In 1809, on a plot overlooking Barn Creek, he completed his octagonal, animal-powered tabby cane press and the adjoining “long house” for the boiling of his cane juice. In this facility were facilitated the processes by which the cane juice was boiled, then allowed to ferment and crystallize in the production of sugar and molasses for marketing at Savannah and Charleston.

The use of tabby as an architectural concept predates the establishment of Georgia in 1733. For example, the Spanish employed a form of tabby, based on coquina shell, in the 16th and early 17th century architecture of their colonial capital at St. Augustine. Tabby was adopted—using oyster shell—by Oglethorpe’s colonists in the 1730s in Georgia, at Wormsloe on the Isle of Hope near Savannah, and at Frederica on St. Simons Island. Spalding’s understanding of tabby likely evolved from his early years (1770s) at Frederica where his parents, James and Margery McIntosh Spalding, had their permanent home.

Later at Sapelo, Spalding reintroduced the use of tabby to coastal Georgia with the construction of his sugar mill. The structure was built to Spalding’s own design, based on the Jamaican model for sugar manufactories. Spalding elucidated the rationale behind his sugar works, and the details of its construction, in his 1816 publication, Observations on the Method of Planting and Cultivating the Sugar-Cane in Georgia and South Carolina.

Spalding’s tabby techniques using equal amounts of water, sand, oyster shell and lime (extracted from the ash residue of burnt shell) had proved highly successful in the early phases of the construction of his permanent home on the South End of Sapelo, three miles from the Long Tabby. Work on the house had been started by Spalding in 1807, and would be
completed three years later in 1810. Thus, the sugar mill construction was concurrent with that of South End House and, in Spalding’s mind, was likely the more immediate project since it entailed potential agricultural profits.

It was Spalding’s theory that what was good for the goose was good for the gander. If his tabby and planting methodology was successful for his own enterprises on Sapelo, then it should work equally well for his peers along the south Atlantic coast. Spalding, not surprisingly considering his agrarian philosophies, was a great proponent of localism and regionalism, feeling that the southern tidewater could become the economic engine of the South.

This approach coincides nicely with the fact that Spalding was not selfish with his ideas. Since tabby proved so useful he shared his concepts with his contemporaries through numerous published writings in the agricultural journals of the day, the *Southern Agriculturist* and the *Southern Cultivator*. In fact, the editor of the *Southern Agriculturist*, John D. Legare of Charleston, S.C., was so impressed with Sapelo’s sugar and Sea Island cotton operations during his visit in the winter of 1832 that he pronounced the island plantation one of the most efficiently managed in the South.

Spalding’s tabby influence is evident in areas well beyond Sapelo. The ruins of the sugar works and rum distillery at the Thicket, seven miles northeast of Darien, are attributable to Spalding. William Carnochan, a rum merchant from Savannah, constructed the Thicket works in 1816, based on Spalding’s Sapelo prototype. Later, Spalding and Carnochan built a two-story tabby warehouse on the Darien waterfront, immediately east of the present highway 17 bridge. The ruins of this structure are still in evidence. It was from this facility that were shipped much of the sugar, cotton, rice and rum produced by Spalding.

The rising tariffs on sugar made further commercial exportation of that staple commodity prohibitive by the middle 1840s, thus Spalding ended sugar production at his Long Tabby cane mill. The boiling house and the adjoining press fell into disuse and were roofless ruins after the Civil War.

According to the journal of Archibald McKinley, a brother in law of the two grandsons of Thomas Spalding, the Long Tabby was partially restored in 1870. McKinley and his wife Sarah utilized the old boiling house as a residence for several years before construction of their permanent residence on Barn Creek (later Post Office Creek) about a hundred yards south of Long Tabby.5

By the time automotive industrialist Howard E. Coffin acquired Sapelo in 1912, the Long Tabby complex was once again a complete ruin.
(see photo) with only the exterior tabby walls of the boiling house and cane press still standing. In 1920, during the work to rebuild the South End mansion, Coffin facilitated a simultaneous restoration of the Long Tabby boiling house for residential use.

In his restoration of Long Tabby, Coffin applied stucco to stabilize Spalding’s tabby, added a second floor and installed interior plumbing and electrical service. Soon after, when Long Tabby became the primary guest facility on Sapelo, Coffin constructed a swimming pool in front of the building overlooking the creek and salt marshes.

After Richard J. Reynolds bought Sapelo in 1934, the Long Tabby continued to be used as a guesthouse. For four years, from 1948 to 1952, Reynolds provided Long Tabby for use as a summer camp for children from all over the state. Two bunk houses, a kitchen and a dining hall were built adjacent to Long Tabby, structures still in use in the present day by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

Long Tabby today looks very much as it appeared after the Coffin restoration of the early 1920s. It houses the Sapelo Island post office, and the administrative offices of the DNR Wildlife Resources Division and the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve.

**South End House**
*(Spalding, Coffin, Reynolds)*

From 1807 to 1810, Thomas Spalding constructed his plantation residence, South End. He designed the house himself, modeling the structure on the Greek-Italianate (Palladian) architectural style. One story, not fully substantiated, is that Spalding, during his U.S. senatorial term from 1806 to 1809 with his concurrent acquaintance with President Thomas Jefferson, visited the Jeffersonian home, Monticello, then under construction. Monticello was also built to the Palladian style and several of the concepts embodied in the Virginia residence were incorporated into Spalding’s South End. Spalding’s biographer, Ellis Merton Coulter, notes that Spalding’s house was built by his slaves under the supervision of contractor Roswell King (see note 7).

![Roswell King, 1765-1844, builder of South End.](image)

Despite an unfortunate dearth of surviving records, Coulter, thoroughly understanding his subject, was able to capture the thought processes of Spalding in relation to South End. Coulter writes:

“It was to be more than a house, or even a home; it was to be part of Spalding himself—an expression, and a useful one, of his idea of permanence on Sapelo…it would be strong enough to resist the most furious of hurricanes that were given to sweeping in from the sea; it would be a house cool in summer and warm in winter. South End was not the prototypical antebellum Southern plantation house. Rather than featuring the usual high-columned front portico, Spalding designed his home to be built
on one level, low to the ground to better resist offshore tropical storms and northeasters. Its tabby walls were two to three feet thick in places, further testimony to the durability of the structure. In a letter to the *Southern Agriculturist* in July 1844, Spalding noted that “…My house at Sapelo is one-story…It is 90 feet by 65 feet in depth, besides the Wings. The Roof is of Tar and Sand…The House is of the Ionic order [and] was built by six men, 2 Boys and two mules (one White Man Superintending) in two years. I have lived in it for thirty two years.”

The Spalding house was dominated by six columns in front (there are four now); the exterior tabby walls were finished with stucco. As in the present house the large central hall featured a fireplace, with a parlor on the back side of the central block, where Howard Coffin later built the indoor pool area; the dining room, as now, was immediately north of the great hall, with Spalding’s library on the south. There were four corner bedrooms. External colonnaded loggia connected the two flanking wings, or dependencies—the kitchen as the north wing, and the plantation office on the south. Surviving Spalding papers suggest the major part of the construction work on the house was completed in early 1810, but the final touches were not in place until 1812, at which time the residence was fully habitable.

Attesting to the strength of the house was its withstanding the effects of the hurricane that struck the middle part of the Georgia coast in September 1824, a storm that did serious damage to all the planters in the region and hurt Spalding’s cotton, sugar cane and livestock operations on Sapelo and on the mainland. Spalding’s grandson, Charles Spalding Wylly, described this experience in 1915:

“In the darkened room [of South End] was left Mrs. Sarah Spalding, with an infant and three daughters, a nurse for the child, and fear and trembling for their guests…They could be confident that the largest part of the island had overflowed. Few words were spoken. But so solid was the house that they believed no harm could come to it or to them…Low, massive, thick-walled and flat-roofed, it offered no hold to the wind and bid defiance to the storm and gale…”

The best evidence documenting the original appearance of the house was a sketch, remarkable in its detail and depth, rendered in 1858 by the granddaughter of Thomas Spalding, Sallie Spalding (later McKinley). The sketch depicts large live oaks on the front lawn, the front portico of the central block with six Ionic columns, bulls-eye (oval) windows on either side of the portico and the covered loggia on each side of the central block linking the flanking wings to the main structure. The structure is one story. It is fortunate that the sketch has survived, as no other contemporary visual renderings of the house are known to exist. Three years after Sally Spalding sketched the house, the Civil War began and the Spalding descendants abandoned the island. South End fell into ruins resulting from looting and its being vandalized by raiding Union sailors and contraband slaves.

The house was unlivable until 1911 when members of the Sapelo Island Company undertook a partial restoration. The Macon,
Georgia consortium purchased the south end of Sapelo for use as a hunting preserve. At that time the mansion was a near total ruin. Period photographs show the house without a roof and only the exterior tabby walls standing among thick underbrush. The Macon group added a new roof with dormers providing light for upstairs bedrooms, among other improvements pursuant to utilization of the house as a hunting lodge. However, shortly after this work was completed, Detroit automotive pioneer Howard Earle Coffin (1873-1937), chief engineer and vice president of the Hudson Motorcar Company, purchased all of Sapelo. These transactions, totaling $150,000, were a consolidation of the lands of the various owners of Sapelo, including the Macon group (South End), Charles O. Fulton (Marsh Landing tract), A.C. McKinley (Riverside-Long Tabby), Spalding Kenan estate (Duplin River-Kenan Field tract), and Amos Sawyer (North End).

Coffin was a native of Ohio and studied engineering at the University of Michigan where he built his first internal combustion engine. By 1899 he had built his first automobile, a steam-powered device. Coffin was later employed by Ransom Olds as chief designer and, in 1909, Coffin, with Roy Chapin and other Olds employees, formed the Hudson Motorcar Company in Detroit. It was during the 1910-1912 period that Coffin and his Detroit friend and contemporary, Henry Ford, gained extensive national attention for their important contributions to motorcar design. During the First World War years, 1915-18, Coffin conducted a national inventory of industrial capabilities, and developed a campaign to support war preparedness. As a consequence of this activity, he was named by President Woodrow Wilson to the Council of National Defense. In this capacity he directed the Aircraft Production Board from which much of the development ensued for the fledgling Army Air Service.

Shortly after World War I, Howard and Matilda (Teddy) Coffin determined to undertake a complete restoration of the mansion as part of their intention to make Sapelo Island their permanent home. Extant photographs from circa 1920 depict the mansion completely gutted except for the original exterior tabby walls. The restoration design was rendered by Detroit architect Albert Kahn while the work was overseen by Albert Wilson, a Swedish contractor who also simultaneously supervised the restoration of the north end residence on nearby St. Catherines Island, in which Coffin had a half interest. Like his Sapelo predecessor, Thomas
Spalding, Coffin was an innovator, a visionary—in essence, he literally brought Sapelo into the twentieth century by building new roads and paving them with shell, cleared the long-fallow agricultural fields and replanted crops, used his engineering skills (and dynamite) to dig irrigation canals on the island, cut pine timber and operated a sawmill to process the lumber, built barns and other farm structures on the South End, maintained a herd of free-ranging dairy cattle on the island, started a shrimp and oyster cannery on Barn Creek to process locally-caught seafood, and had a boat yard and marine railway on the South End at the present Marine Institute site. All of these activities provided employment for the several hundred African Americans residing on the island since emancipation and the end of the Civil War fifty years earlier.

Notes the young cousin of Coffin, Alfred W. (Bill) Jones, Sr. (1902-1981), manager of the Sapelo Island Plantation for Coffin during the 1920s, the rebuilt South End House was to be “a palatial estate built on the tabby foundations and walls of Thomas Spalding’s original house... The new main house was completed in 1925 with its lavish living room, library, indoor swimming pool, huge upstairs ballroom and nautical recreation room and lounge in the downstairs basement...” Coffin himself oversaw construction of the new house. Utilizing Sallie...
Spalding’s 1858 sketch, Coffin was able to effectively recreate the antebellum exterior of the house as built by Spalding over one hundred years earlier. Meanwhile, the grandson of Thomas Spalding, Charles Spalding Wylly, compiled a history of Sapelo Island for Coffin and was able to recall the floor plan of the original Spalding house. Wylly also sketched Spalding’s landscape design, a plan followed in concept by Coffin. Both these plans appeared in the 1933 book *Garden History of Georgia*, which featured the Coffin mansion on Sapelo.

Perhaps the most evocative description of the Coffin house is provided by journalist Cornelia M. Wilder, an account written in 1930, not long after the completion of the restoration and its occupancy by the Coffins:

“The house is a magnificent building, the center part giving the effect of being one-story with extremely high walls and French windows over each of which is a small oval window. At either end are small square buildings, which are connected with the main house by covered passageways. In one of these are the bedrooms, sitting rooms and sun parlor of Mr. and Mrs. Coffin, in the other the kitchen, pantries and servants quarters. Four huge Ionic columns of white stone support the roof which is held over the front piazza, while a very wide and long tiled terrace extends the length of the building. Reflecting the beauties of the house and shaded by magnificent moss-grown live oaks is a sunken pool in the midst of the lawn where flowers bloom and two giant water jars of Spanish pottery and statues of Carrara marble meet the eye. The house faces the ocean which can be seen in the distance, and between it and the house are the extensive gardens and greenhouse…The mansion is very beautiful inside with a huge reception room which opens into the sun parlor the center of which is occupied by a marble swimming pool which is tiled with emerald green and blue, flecked with gold, while at the end of the sun parlor is a fountain which sprays water over a statue of a bathing girl. No matter how cold the weather, swimming is enjoyed in the pool, which is heated when necessary, a fire in the huge fireplace also adding warmth after the swim. The bedrooms are in suites, each with its own..."
private bath, and some with private sitting rooms as well. They are all furnished beautifully with color furnished by brightly colored glazed chintz. On the second floor is the suite occupied by ex-President Coolidge and Mrs. Coolidge on their visit to Mr. and Mrs. Coffin a year or so ago [1928]. The adjoining bedroom was the president’s office with private telephone connecting directly with the White House and capitol. According to regulations, secret service men had to occupy rooms on either side of the President’s room and were on guard all during the night. It was while on this visit that the portraits of the president and his wife were painted by [Frank] Salisbury, the well-known English portrait painter who accompanied them to the island. The background of Mrs. Coolidge’s painting is easily recognized as the lawns of Sapelo. At the same time were painted portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Coffin, which hang in the hall and dining room. Another distinguished guest whose name lends glamour to the guest book is that of Col. Charles Lindbergh, who flew by [in 1929] to visit the Coffins. At the front of the house on the top floor is a beautiful ballroom with a projecting machine where moving pictures taken by the host on his travels are shown. In the library are many priceless old maps of the coast of Georgia, an old Spanish one of the date of 1773 being made into the wall over the mantelpiece. Everything connected with the early history of Georgia is of vital interest to Mr. Coffin, and he collects everything that will give him information on the subject. His library is filled with fascinating old books of history and he has given every assistance to those who have come to Sapelo to study the ruins of the Spanish Missions and to open up the Indian mounds. In the basement is the game room where bowling alleys and all sorts of games are arranged. The approach to the game room is most attractive, being down a winding stair which leads from the drawing room into what gives the appearance of being a lounge…All sorts of interesting relics are displayed [including] autographed photographs of

Howard & Matilda Coffin with President & First Lady Coolidge.

Coffin at Chocolate with Edsel Ford & family.

Howard Coffin and President & First Lady Hoover at Chocolate Plantation, 1932.
Harold Martin, in his 50th anniversary history of the Cloister, *This Happy Isle* (1978), noted that Coffin was a stickler for every detail regarding the reconstruction of the house: “Coffin would come down to Sapelo (from Detroit) periodically, arriving unexpectedly, to look into every detail of what the house builder, Arthur Wilson, had done during his absence. Frequently he would order what had been built torn down and done over again. As a result, the house was built and rebuilt about three times before Coffin was finally satisfied…[It was a house that] centered around a high-ceilinged living room, heavily beamed in the Spanish manner, where Coffin loved to entertain with a lavish hand as did his predecessor, Thomas Spalding. Off this room, with its massive stone fireplace, lay the indoor swimming pool where Coffin would take his morning cold-water plunge; the dining room with its huge refectory table…a billiard room and a library. Off the living room were two master bedrooms, and upstairs was a huge ballroom, which could also be used as a movie theater. Downstairs, in a vast, stone-floored, rough-beamed basement, was one of Howard Coffin’s favorite rooms [a game room complete with one-lane bowling alley].” W. Robert Moore, writing in the *National Geographic* in 1934, noted, “Nowhere else have I seen such a delightful setting for a great house as that on Sapelo. In the midst of a cathedral-like bower of live oaks, stands the majestic, colonial house…” A local historian, Burnette Vanstory, writing in 1969 in *Howard Earle Coffin*, a brief biography of Coffin’s life and legacy, noted that, “Acting as his own architect and with his Sapelo employees as his builders, he produced a house of unsurpassed beauty and dignity.”

Coffin’s vision almost exactly mirrored that of his nineteenth century predecessor, Spalding. His plans did not end with the restoration of the house. “Bill Jones,” notes Harold Martin, “lived in his austere bachelor’s quarters in the south wing, but would often come to the basement lounge to listen while Coffin sat by the fire and talked of his dreams of bringing back to Sapelo the glories of its ancient past…It was, as Jones remembers now, truly a time of wine and roses, those few years before the crash. Everybody was rich, and enjoying their riches…Coffin had an income at this time of about $800,000 a year from his investments in automobile and aviation stock and Detroit real estate. He had over 200 people working for him on Sapelo. All around him things were happening…people were busy clearing the fields, planting pastures for beef and dairy herds, bridging creeks and digging artesian wells…” Coffin and Bill Jones became close friends with a young McIntosh County real estate agent, Paul Varner, a man who impressed Coffin with his expertise in overseeing the dynamiting of drainage ditches on Sapelo. Coffin hired Varner, with Varner becoming an important factor in the administration of the affairs of both Sapelo and the new Sea Island Company formed by Coffin.

A number of well-known people were guests of Howard and Matilda Coffin during their residency in the mansion, 1925 to 1933. Two presidents, Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover, were guests at the house in 1928 and 1932, respectively, as was the aviator Charles A. Lindbergh in February 1929. The visit to Sapelo by President and Mrs. Coolidge occurred in
December 1928 at the end of his administration. The Coolidges arrived in Brunswick by train from Washington, D.C. and were met by Mr. and Mrs. Coffin, after which they were transported to Sapelo aboard the Coffins’ newly-built 124-foot yacht, Zapala. During their Sapelo sojourn, the President enjoyed the outdoor hunting on Sapelo, as well as beach activities featuring many members of the island’s African-American community. The Coolidges also visited the new Sea Island resort just opened by Coffin and Bill Jones, where the President planted an oak tree on the grounds of the Cloister. Another aspect of the Sapelo visit was the rendering of the oil painting portraits of Calvin and Grace Coolidge by the well-known English artist Frank O. Salisbury who accompanied the Coolidges from Washington. The President and First Lady sat for their portraits in the library annex of the Coffin mansion. Later, after the departure of their guests, Salisbury remained to render the portraits of Howard and Matilda Coffin. These paintings are displayed facing each other on the north and south walls of the Great Room of the mansion.

Other prominent visitors include Coffin’s fellow automotive pioneer, Henry Ford, Edsel Ford (son of Henry), Cason and Fuller Callaway (both textile magnates from LaGrange), Ivan Allen and Asa Candler, Jr., both of Atlanta, golfer Bobby Jones, Clare Booth Brokaw (later Luce of the Time magazine Luce family), and many others—including Richard J. Reynolds, Jr. (1906-1964), heir to his father’s North Carolina tobacco fortune, who visited Sapelo in 1932 and 1933 pursuant to his subsequent purchase of the island from Coffin a year later.12

Coffin sold Sapelo in the midst of the Great Depression, largely to facilitate the solvency of the Sea Island Company and the Cloister Hotel, entities which he founded in nearby Glynn County in 1926, and managed by Bill Jones, Sr. Matilda Coffin died of heart failure in 1932 and, following devastating Depression-era financial losses and a disastrous second marriage, Howard Coffin took his own life at Sea Island in 1937. It was a sad ending to the story of one of the great men in the history of Sapelo, coastal Georgia and American industrial development.

R.J. Reynolds, soon after his acquisition of Sapelo, engaged the services of Atlanta architect Philip T. Shutze (1890-1982), a Georgia Tech graduate, to modify the big house and update it...
to meet his preferences. This work was largely completed by the end of 1936. Shutze also contracted the Italian-born Atlanta bird artist Athos Menaboni (1896-1990) and his wife Sara to paint the various murals on the walls in the swimming pool area and solarium, the downstairs game room and the upstairs Circus Room.

Reynolds was married four times. His first marriage to Elizabeth (Blitz) Dillard lasted only a year and it was during that time that Reynolds took steps to improve the security of the mansion in light of the much-publicized Lindbergh baby kidnapping in 1932. Reynolds typically utilized Sapelo Island as a seasonal residence, and he established close ties to members of the local Darien and McIntosh County community during his sojourn on the island, including his local attorney and agent, Paul Varner, and county sheriff Tom Poppell. Much has been said and written about Reynolds’ festive (and occasionally quite rowdy) parties and social functions on Sapelo. He enjoyed entertaining and having guests during his stays on the island. Almost as legendary among locals was his stormy relationship with his third wife, Muriel Greenough (whom he married in 1952) and their celebrated divorce trial at the courthouse in nearby Darien in 1960 and the retrial in 1962. Reynolds’ fourth wife was Annemarie Schmidt, whom he married in 1961. The couple lived most of Reynolds’ final years in Switzerland, where Reynolds, desperately sick with emphysema, died at the age of 58 in December 1964.

In 1949, Reynolds opened the South End House to paying guests, primarily as a means to ease his Sapelo Island tax burden. This operation was called the Sapelo Plantation Inn and its facilities included the mansion and the nearby quadrangle complex, part of which now comprises the apartments at the UGA Marine Institute. This facility operated for several years before Reynolds provided the use of the dairy barn and associated buildings around the quadrangle to the University of Georgia for a new marine biological research station.

Reynolds compiled a typed booklet of information about Sapelo and its history for the enjoyment of guests coming to the island. Parts of it are worth quoting for it gives us some insight into his thinking:

“…[Thomas] Spalding was his own architect. He built [the main house] for permanency as well as beauty. The thick walls are even today in very good condition….The mansion was one of the first with high columns to be built in Georgia, and one of the very few ever built on the Coast…Sapelo was known for its princely hospitality and tired city friends, like William Scarborough of Savannah, who in 1831 wrote of visiting Spalding “a for a change of air and a sea bath”

…Following the Civil War Sapelo went into a decline until Howard Coffin fell in love with the island on a shooting trip, about 1911. He later purchased the island and began [its] reconstruction. The walls of Spalding’s mansion were waiting, and Mr. Coffin began the restoration of the old mansion with a new roof, floors, bathrooms, and the addition of a swimming pool. During the Twenties, once again Sapelo brought happiness to its guests…After Mrs. Coffin’s death, Mr. Coffin did not like to entertain without her, and I bought the island in 1934, having also fallen in love with it when I visited him some years before for a shooting party. With Mr. Coffin’s continued interest and valuable
advice, I completely air-conditioned the mansion (one of the first big private homes), built a modern power plant, docks and barns. The work was completed by Christmas 1936, when Mr. Coffin visited me and enthusiastically approved the work and the redecoration of the mansion. Some of the furniture and rugs are from my father’s old home in North Carolina. The sideboard in the dining room is the original one that Thomas Spalding had in the same place. I obtained it from Randolph Spalding of Savannah…”

NOTES

1 There are several other buildings in the county that are nearly as old as the two Sapelo Island structures to be discussed herein. The long-unused (and exceedingly fragile) Adam Strain building on the upper bluff of the Darien River waterfront was constructed of tabby circa 1815-1820. The original exterior walls still stand although the interior was gutted by fire during the Union raid on Darien in June 1863. On Sapelo Island, the lighthouse was built in 1820 and is still in use as a navigational aid 190 years later. The historical background of many of McIntosh County’s nineteenth century buildings are discussed in varying degrees of detail in Buddy Sullivan, *Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater: The Story of McIntosh County and Sapelo* (6th edition, 2001); see also the “Chapman Report: The Historic Buildings Survey of McIntosh County” (Georgia Department of Natural Resources Historic Preservation Division, 1989), which is a comprehensive cataloging of all the standing structures in the county built prior to 1940.

2 The best known of Spalding’s mainland buildings was his winter residence near Darien, Ashantilly, built of tabby circa 1819-20 (still in use). Spalding was also involved in the construction of tabby warehouses on the Darien River waterfront (1818-19), the tabby sugar mill and rum distillery at the Thicket seven miles northeast of Darien (1816), slave cabins at the Thicket and on the north end of Creighton Island (1830s, 1840s), and the tabby structures associated with Chocolate plantation on Sapelo Island (ca. 1815-19). For Spalding’s philosophies regarding the use of tabby see the definitive biography of Spalding by Ellis Merton Coulter, *Thomas Spalding of Sapelo* (Baton Rouge, 1940); also, Buddy Sullivan, *Old Tabby*: The Ashantilly Legacy of Thomas Spalding and William G. Haynes (2009), and Buddy Sullivan, Ecology as History in the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve (Occasional Papers of the Sapelo Island NERR, 2008).

3 Spalding himself composed a detailed account of the building of his sugar mill and the manufacture of sugar on Sapelo Island, *Observations of the Method of Planting and Cultivating the Sugar-Cane in Georgia and South Carolina* (Charleston, SC, 1816).

4 Spalding’s concepts for tabby buildings are elucidated in Coulter, *Thomas Spalding of Sapelo*; Sullivan, Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater; and Sullivan, *Old Tabby*. The standard study of the use of tabby by Spalding and his contemporaries remains E. Merton Coulter, ed., *Georgia’s Disputed Ruins* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1937), particularly the account contained therein by Marmaduke Floyd, “Certain Tabby Ruins on the Georgia Coast.”


6 The various phases of the building of the South End House by Spalding and the later reconstruction by Howard E. Coffin are detailed in Sullivan, *Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater*, 99-101, 135-37, 429-30, 611-18; see also Coulter, *Thomas Spalding of Sapelo*, and Sullivan, *Old Tabby*. Georgia Department of Natural Resources historian Kenneth H. Thomas (ret) has conducted extensive research on virtually every aspect of the house. Most of his findings are contained in his papers on deposit at the Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, GA. A comparative discussion of the building of Spalding’s Sapelo South End and his mainland home near Darien (Ashantilly, ca. 1820) is contained in Sullivan, *Old Tabby*, op. cit., 7-15.

7 Coulter, *Thomas Spalding of Sapelo*, 43. Roswell King (1765-1844), a native New Englander who supervised the work on Spalding’s house, was also the resident manager for the two Georgia plantations of Major Pierce Butler of Philadelphia at the time. These were the cotton plantation, Hampton, on the north end of St. Simons, within sight of the south end of Sapelo, and the Butler rice plantation in the Altamaha delta.
just south of Darien. Spalding and King were business leaders of the region and both were instrumental in obtaining the state charter for the establishment of the influential Bank of Darien in 1818.


9 Harold Martin, *This Happy Isle: The Story of Sea Island and the Cloister*, 1978 1st edition, 16; Maxwell Taylor Courson, “Howard Earle Coffin, King of the Georgia Coast,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 83 (Summer 1999): 322-41. The details of Coffin’s activities on Sapelo and Sea Island are covered in Chapter 16 of Sullivan, *Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater*. During the Coffin period of island ownership, 1912-1934, Sapelo was spelled in the old English fashion, “Sapeloe”.

10 At the time this piece was written by Mrs. Wilder, much of the contemporaneous academic thought associated the ruins of tabby structures on Sapelo and the other coastal islands with the remnants of Spanish Franciscan missions, which proliferated the coast from ca. 1570 to 1680. In 1937, a scholarly study researched and written by Marmaduke Floyd of Savannah, “Certain Tabby Ruins on the Georgia Coast” as the main portion of the book, *Georgia’s Disputed Ruins*, proved conclusively that the tabby structures on Sapelo and elsewhere were those of antebellum plantation structures (see section on Long Tabby above). An overview of this subject is in Sullivan, *Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater*, 49-53 and 102-04.


12 Coffin Guest Register, Sapelo Island, 1917-1934, Sea Island Company archives. For a more extensive listing of visitors see also Sullivan, *Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater*, 650-51. Also of interest relevant to the Sapelo house during the Coffin era is The *Cloister Bells*, special publication by the Sea Island Company, 1930, which features a photographic spread on the Sapelo house, and *National Geographic Magazine*, February 1934 issue. The latter publication devoted a section to coastal Georgia and prominently featured Howard Coffin and the Sapelo Island mansion.

13 The modernization plans for the Sapelo house by Shutze are on deposit at Georgia Tech. Another Georgia Tech graduate, architect Augustus E. Constantine, designed the rebuilding of the farm complex on the south end of Sapelo, work also completed in 1936. These buildings became the University of Georgia Marine Institute in 1953 and continue to serve in that capacity to the present day.

14 The best published account of R.J. Reynolds, Jr. is *The Gilded Leaf* by Patrick Reynolds (1989). Patrick Reynolds was a son of R.J. Reynolds. Unfortunately, the book is not documented with source notes and parts of the Sapelo Island story must be taken with the proverbial grain of salt. Still, the book is a fascinating account, not only of Dick Reynolds but of the entire Reynolds family.


16 Reynolds’ provision of facilities to the University of Georgia also included the docks and boathouse on South End Creek and the Sapelo Island utility vessel Kit Jones, built to Reynolds’ specifications in 1939, named for Katherine T. Jones, wife of Bill Jones, Sr. A profile plan and information on the Kit Jones is contained in Sullivan, *Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater*, 676-77.

17 This document bears the date November 19, 1955. The Randolph Spalding referred to by Reynolds was the last surviving direct descendant of Thomas Spalding to bear the family name. He was the only great-grandson of Thomas and Sarah Spalding. Randolph Spalding died at Savannah in 1954 and he, like most others of the Spalding family, are interred in the family plot at St. Andrews Cemetery on the mainland adjacent to the Spaldings’ mainland home, Ashantilly, associated the ruins of tabby structures on Sapelo and the other coastal islands with the remnants of Spanish Franciscan missions, which proliferated the coast from ca. 1570 to 1680. In 1937, a scholarly study researched and written by Marmaduke Floyd of Savannah, “Certain Tabby Ruins on the Georgia Coast” as the main portion of the book, *Georgia’s Disputed Ruins*, proved conclusively that the tabby structures on Sapelo and elsewhere were those of antebellum plantation structures (see section on Long Tabby above). An overview of this subject is in Sullivan, *Early Days on the Georgia Tidewater*, 49-53 and 102-04.