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Island Passage: An Illustrated History of Jekyll Island, Georgia

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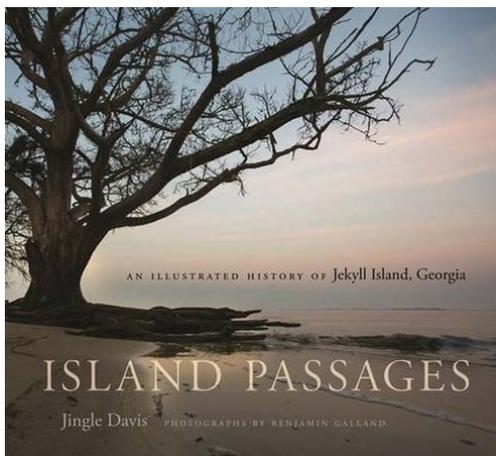
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Island Passages: An Illustrated History of Jekyll Island, Georgia. Jingle Davis; Photographs by Benjamin Galland. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8203-4869-8 (hardbound). 288 p. \$34.95



Jekyll Island, one of Georgia's Golden Isles, is featured in the extensively researched pictorial volume *Island Passages: An Illustrated History of Jekyll Island, Georgia*. Jingle Davis and Benjamin Galland, both natives of nearby St. Simon's Island, relate the history and highlight the natural wonders of this favored destination for so many travelers. Ms. Davis is a retired journalist who worked for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and the author of *Island Time: An Illustrated History of St. Simons Island, Georgia*. Here she displays her craft through in-depth research and attention to detail. In the preface she charms the reader with personal reminiscences and shares her connection with Jekyll and her recognition and appreciation of its history and natural gifts. The majority of the photographs were contributed by Galland and enhance the chapters by illustrating topics covered in the text.

Though entertaining the reader with accounts from Jekyll's founding through its heyday as a refuge for press-shy millionaires at the start of the last century, the author does not shy away from less savory periods of Jekyll's history; namely the slave owners who benefited from the slave trade off the Georgia coast and the state's intergovernmental wrangling over possession and stewardship of the island as a resort for its citizens.

Benefiting from a rich social history bestowed by the diverse cultural backgrounds of its settlers, the island reflected many different influences in its early days. From early indigenous people living off local cultivation and fishing to the Spanish and French cultures introduced by the explorers, there was inevitable conflict between competing countries for possession. With the arrival of James Oglethorpe in 1736 and the establishment of Georgia as a debtor's colony, the British eventually prevailed in taking the island under its wing and named it Jekyll in honor of Sir Joseph Jekyll, a key benefactor of the expedition.

For approximately 65 years, the island served as the home for William Horton, Oglethorpe's compatriot, friend and ally. He set up a plantation and built a house, of which the second iteration, built of tabby (building material using shells), still stands and is designated as a National Historic Landmark. After Horton's death and temporary possession by several individuals, the island eventually passed into the hands of Christophe du Bignon, a wealthy landowner fleeing the excesses of the French Revolution. Establishing a plantation built on slave labor, ownership of the island stayed in the family until the last remaining du Bignon, John Eugene, after founding the Jekyll Island Club, sold the island to the club for \$125,000 in the late 1880's.

The plantation period of Jekyll's history evokes reminders of slave labor and the horrendous conditions that they endured. Ms. Davis devotes a section to *The Wanderer*, a racing yacht used as the last documented American slave ship to import slaves in 1858, fifty years after the U.S. had abolished the practice. Her description of the horrors the captives endured during the voyage provides context for their resilience in bearing unimaginable hardship, yet continuing to strive to overcome their circumstances.

The island achieved widespread name recognition in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the exclusive Jekyll Island Club became the destination for the fabulously wealthy titans of the country. Rockefeller, Pulitzer, and J.P. Morgan were but a few of the patrons of the club. Tangible reminders of the Jekyll Island Club years are the buildings themselves, where millionaires spent the winters on the island in the resort's clubhouse or in their custom-built "cottages." Due to a decline in members after the Great Depression, the club eventually closed after World War II.

With the purchase of the island by Georgia in 1947, Ms. Davis provides an entertaining, but biting account of how politics, corruption and dueling agendas within the government came close to sabotaging the assets Jekyll has to offer the state's citizens. Thanks to belated recognition of Jekyll's possibilities, the island now serves as a state resort - making use of the Jekyll Island Club's renovated buildings - as well as a destination for its natural resources. The Georgia Sea Turtle Center, which provides care as well as educating visitors, is one of its most notable attractions.

While the abundance of photographs make the book a pleasure to browse through, it is the wealth of salient detail provided by the author that engages the reader. With the inclusion of a select bibliography and general index, *Island Passages* is a useful addition to public and academic libraries.

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