

Spring 5-1-2023

## Row Upon Row: Sea Grass Baskets of the South Carolina Lowcountry, 4th Edition

Samantha Duncan  
*Coastal Carolina University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln>



Part of the [Information Literacy Commons](#), [Scholarly Communication Commons](#), and the [Scholarly Publishing Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Duncan, Samantha (2023) "Row Upon Row: Sea Grass Baskets of the South Carolina Lowcountry, 4th Edition," *The Southeastern Librarian*: Vol. 71: Iss. 1, Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln/vol71/iss1/5>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Southeastern Librarian by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu).

came an informal support network that was so impassioned that it sometimes led to friendly competition between residents. Activist and self-improvement practices common at 309 include protests, reading groups, sports and other physical fitness activities, food sharing, foreign language lessons, and boatbuilding. Another through line found in these narratives revolves around the efforts of 309 residents to connect with other progressive or marginalized institutions in the larger community. Unsatisfied with existing in their own bubble, the residents were continually searching for ways to make broader positive change in the world.

What is especially interesting in reading the subjects' takes on 309, punk, and the Pensacola scene is the difference in how they view these things, which they all seem to hold as important influences. For example, several of the residents interviewed are either directly involved with the purchase and preservation of the house or active proponents of efforts to archive and preserve the artifacts and stories surrounding it. Others are of the opinion that the energy and resources put toward these 309 projects would be better spent looking toward the future instead of the past. With so many voices stretching across so many years, there was bound to be some divergence of opinion on what the whole thing meant and what to do with its legacy.

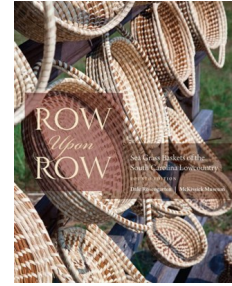
To readers unfamiliar with the culture of punk and DIY, *Punkhouse* serves as a compelling ethnology of one of its more unique and unlikely hubs, nestled in the Florida panhandle. While much has been written about the bands and cultural icons of the music side of things, this book succeeds in relating the everyday stories of a scrappy, unpretentious collection of artists, writers, musicians, activists, do-gooders, and dreamers who passed through the same rickety doorways of a former railroad flophouse in Pensacola. To those already familiar with the Pensacola punk scene and 309, the book, unearthing stories from 25 years of continuous activity, provides a deeper view into the house's history than had previously been recorded. While there are parallels with recent books on the rise of the Athens, Georgia music scene in the 1980s, *Punkhouse* does not delve into tales of booming popularity and flirtations with mainstream success; instead, it looks inward and asks the members of a particular scene to tell

a story, their story. *A Punkhouse in the Deep South* would complement regional history, pop culture, and southern cultural studies collections in public and academic libraries.

Stephen Michaels, University of North Georgia

***Row Upon Row: Sea Grass Baskets of the South Carolina Lowcountry, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition***

Dale Rosengarten  
Columbia: University of South  
Carolina Press, 2022  
ISBN:9781643362731  
96 p. \$18.99 (Pbk)



South Carolina's Lowcountry basketry is a uniquely beautiful example of African American folk art, and in this historical nonfiction fourth edition of *Row Upon Row: Sea Grass Baskets of the South Carolina Lowcountry*, Dale Rosengarten describes the history of Lowcountry basketry, the connection to thriving rice production and the difficulties confronted by South Carolina Lowcountry sewers. In this edition, the author added the modern-day challenges the tradition and the sewers face. "Basketry was introduced in Carolina in the late seventeenth century with origins in ancient African folk art" (p.1). African American basketry grew out of a utilitarian need for rice cultivation, but is now being created as conceptual art and respected and coveted by museums, collectors, and consumers.

This book includes an in-depth, well-researched examination of Lowcountry basket making that has a significant influence on the readers' understanding of the issues encountered by sewers both past and present. The book reveals the contributions the baskets and sewers had to the success of rice cultivation in the Lowcountry plantations. The importance of the sewers, their endurance, and the significance of basket-making are unmistakable. "By the mid-eighteenth century, rice would become the principal crop and attributed to the wealthiest group of planters in America" (p.1). Rice cultivation could not have been possible without the fanner, a coiled basket crafted by enslaved Africans used to fan the rice to blow away the chaff. While rice production was the

leading motive behind the manufacture of baskets, other functions would emerge, such as using them for “African American babies sunning in blanket-padded ‘fanner baskets’, supervised by ‘mauma or nurse’ or used as a head tote basket to carry heavy loads or used as sewing, vegetable, and bread baskets, and work baskets” (pp.13-14). “The crafting of baskets also contributed to the economic opportunities and independence of enslaved men, as well as helping women’s mental health through avenues of expression with one sewer stating it’s enjoyed because it’s a relaxing kind of therapy” (p.33).

Explanations of the techniques such as coiling, materials used called the foundation, and stitching elements called the binder or weaver are described in detail. The book provides several illustrations of the tools handled, the labor involved, and the completed creations. In this latest edition, Rosengarten’s expertise in African American basketry is evident from years of fieldwork and investigation, which continues to this day revealing the challenges that are being confronted. “Challenges such as imported knock-offs, scarce sweetgrass, highway development, and the opposition met with trying to convince the newer generations to carry on the tradition threaten the future of the trade” (p.51). The author’s ability to continue the research to include up-to-date information is notable and an indicator of the commitment to South Carolina Lowcountry basketry promotion and education.

The book is clear, concise, and easy to understand, and for readers with no previous knowledge about Lowcountry basket making, African American folk art, or Gullah/Geechee culture, it is exceedingly informative. Rosengarten includes numerous sewers’ experiences that enhance interest, adds authenticity, and gives the reader a glimpse into this traditional craft’s past and present. The limited documentation on Lowcountry basket making, the methods used, the artists’ stories, and the impact these elements had on rice cultivation make this book even more special and valued. It is apparent that the author’s purpose in writing the book is to highlight the tradition and to ensure that history is preserved.

*Row Upon Row: Sea Grass Baskets of the South Carolina Lowcountry’s* greatest worth is the contribution it has to the safeguarding of Lowcountry African American culture. The content

reveals a crucial part of southern history. If readers are drawn to learning about the historical significance of Lowcountry basketry, the specific creation process, and African American art, this book is recommended. It is also a pertinent addition to any public or academic library collection.

Rosengarten is a historian and curator at the College of Charleston whose research of coiled basketry spans three decades. In the early 1980s, McKissick Museum employed Rosengarten to interview basket makers in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, purchase baskets, and curate an exhibition showcasing the artistry of basketry. Rosengarten has authored a number of publications centered on the African American tradition of coiled basketry and continues to conduct work in this area of study establishing her as an authoritative expert in the field. Additional Rosengarten titles include *Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art* and *Lowcountry Basketry: Folk Arts in the Marketplace*.

Samantha Duncan, Coastal Carolina University

### ***Surfing the South: The Search for Waves and the People Who Ride Them***

Steve Estes  
Chapel Hill: University of  
North Carolina Press, 2022  
ISBN: 9781469667775  
214 p. \$23.00 (Pbk)



In *Surfing the South*, author Mark Estes, a native southerner, history professor, and devoted surfer, documents the region’s little-known surf culture along the Gulf Coast and Eastern Seaboard while chronicling the road trips he embarked on with his adolescent daughter, Zinnia, to learn more about this culture. The result is a unique mashup between a popular history of surfing in the American South and a travelogue that explores the author’s personal reflections on surfing, his identity as a southern transplant, and as a father bonding with his daughter through travel and recreation.

Over the course of two consecutive summers, Estes traveled along the coastal South from Houston, Texas to Ocean City, Maryland interviewing more than 40 individuals previously or