



**Volume #14**

**Winter 2023**

**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](mailto:bill.giles@dnr.ga.gov).**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Time</b>
<b>January 22, 2023</b>	<b>Camellias in the Southern Garden</b>	<b>2:00 p. m.</b>
<b>February 5, 2023</b>	<b>Super Museum Sunday McIntosh Ring Shouters</b>	<b>2:00 p.m.</b>
<b>March 7– April 9, 2023</b>	<b>Easter Egg Scavenger Hunt</b>	<b>Daily 9:00a.m.-4:00 p.m.</b>
<b>March 25, 2023</b>	<b>Plein Air Art Event on the grounds</b>	<b>9 a.m.-2 p.m.</b>

## Slave Songs



Left: Mason Stewart of the Friends of Hofwyl-Broadfield and Right: Griffin Lofton of the McIntosh Ringshouters as they each hold Ms Lydia Parrish's book, Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands.

Friend of Hofwyl-Broadfield, Mr. Mason Stewart and Mr. Griffin Lofton with the McIntosh Ringshouters are each holding the book, Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands by Lydia Parrish. Many feel that Ms. Parrish's book is responsible for the Slave Songs being saved for posterity. Our thanks to Mason Stewart for allowing us to include his article in this newsletter. Mr. Lofton and the McIntosh Ringshouters seen below will be featured at Hofwyl-Broadfield's Super Museum Sunday on February 5, 2023 at 2:00 p.m. The park will be open to the public free of charge on that Sunday from 9 a.m. -5 p.m. with tours of the house on the hour.



## **The Ringshout**

**By: Mason Stewart**

In the beginning, there is the beat. A distinctive clapping of the hands and tapping of the feet. As a broomstick joins in and pounds out the rhythm on the hardwood floor, the dancers begin to move. They move to the beat in a slow counterclockwise manner, shuffling along. Their feet never leaving the floor, heels keeping time with bent legs always moving forward, never crossing. Circling slowly to the beat. Then a voice is heard. A voice that, although carrying a tune, is not really singing and not really talking either, but speaking to the beat:

**“Oh Eve—where is Ad-u-m?”**

**“Oh Eve—Adam in the garden.”**

A chorus answers: **“Pinnin’ Leaves. Pinnin’ Leaves.”**

**“Adam in the garden.”**

**“Pinnin’ Leaves. Pinnin’ Leaves.”**

Thus, begins the Ringshout, a unique demonstration of both performance art and living history. Performance art-- in that it is a carefully choreographed cultural dance performance of the highest caliber. Living history—in that it is the oldest surviving African American performance tradition in North America.

The Gullah Geechee language featured in the songs, grew out of the isolation of the enslaved Africans who toiled in fields on the plantations scattered amongst the lowlands and barrier islands of the coastal South, while many of the rhythms and dance steps performed, trace their origins even further back into the now long forgotten past before the middle passage, to the imagined halcyon days of freedom in West Africa. Performance art and living history that, due to its own uniqueness and isolation, was almost lost forever.

However, thanks to the tireless efforts of a few who grasped its cultural significance and took the time to preserve its history, the authentic performance continues. The tempo of the beat increases. As the dancers move, shuffle, and sway to the beat, they fill their aprons with imaginary leaves and the songster sings out:

**“Lord called Adam.”**

**“Pinnin’ Leaves. Pinnin’ Leaves.”**

**“Adam wouldn’ answer.”**

**“Pinnin’ Leaves. Pinnin’ Leaves.”**

**“Adam Shame”**

Though some of the highly stylized movements may owe their true origins to older Muslim or African tribal ceremonial traditions, historians assert that the Ring Shout itself is a completely original African American art form. It is a unique cultural expression that grew out of an enslaved people's exposure to the teachings of Colonial Christianity. Not the redemptive Christianity as practiced by their masters, but a Christianity as viewed through the eyes of those, who --robbed of everything else--yearned for the promised freedom of a joyous hereafter.

So, as the performance continues, each Ring Shout tells its own unique story, ever expanding on those early traditions.

Now the Shouters sing out:

**"Come t' tell you 'bout Jubilee"**

**"A-a-ah my Lord!"**

**"My Mother done gone to Jubilee!"**

**"My soul rock on Jubilee!"**

**"I got a right in Jubilee!"**

**"I got a right in Jubilee!"**

This time, they are not just performing a quaint traditional Slave song of the Georgia Sea Islands, but are also, on a much deeper level, sharing the soul of an enslaved people. And though the infectious joy of the double-time beat captures the moment and invades the feet, the words—for those who truly listen-- carry a solemn melancholy plea that also tugs long and hard at the heart.

According to historians, the beginnings of the Ringshout as we know it today, probably began as two separate art forms: The Shout, and Ring Play.

The Shout was a purely religious, "call and response" technique adopted by African American preachers to teach and spread the new religion. However, being predominantly Protestant, the new religion did not include the sin of dancing, which was officially discouraged. However, secular Ring Play, which involved both singing and dancing, was also popular at the time and had very strong cultural roots. The rhythmic patterns of ring play fit naturally into the equally rhythmic religious call and response tropes of the day. So, as long as the content was religious in nature and the moves did not involve sinful dance steps like toe tapping, crossing of the legs, or—God forbid! —fiddle playing, the two art forms began to merge as an acceptable form of religious expression. And the Ringshout was born.

Though the Ringshout was rarely performed exactly the same way, the basic elements spread, as an integral part of the religious and cultural life of the enslaved African Americans of the coastal South. And many sang a variation of:

**“Want t’ go t’ Heaven got t’ plumb de line.”**

**“You got t’ Shout right.”**

**“Plumb de line.”**

**“You got t’ Shout right.”**

**“Plumb de line.”**

**“Want t’ go t’ Heaven got t’ plumb de line.”**

Though fiddle playing and secular dancing were officially discouraged and technically not part of the pure Ringshout tradition, their impact on African American plantation life was, nevertheless, significant, and lasting, ultimately making its way into the performance art seen today. Other secular songs like:

**“Once I went out huntin.”**

**“I heard de possum sneeze.”**

**“I holler back to Susan,”**

**“Put on de pot o’ peas”**

Or, the clearly non-religious dance step, known as, **“The Buzzard Lope”** has also become a popular and permanent part of the Ringshout performance tradition. Some African drum routines have also reappeared in modern performances but were strictly forbidden during the plantation era.

Plantation owners believed African drums could be used as secret communication devices by their slaves to plan escapes or even worse insurrections, so they were outlawed on most Southern Plantations. So, not to be denied, the enslaved African Americans invented an entirely new rhythm technique called hamboning or Juba dance, which uses foot stomping and hand slapping of the chest, legs, hands, cheeks, etc. to keep time and replicate their earlier forbidden drum rhythms.

**"Hambone, Hambone**

**Where you been?"**

**"Round the corner**

**And back agin."**

**"Hambone Hambone**

**Where's your wife?"**

**"In the kitchen cookin' rice."**

Then, as pervasive as this African American tradition was throughout the coastal south, it began to slowly disappear. According to Ringshout practitioner and historian, Griffin Lotson of the Geechee Gullah Ring Shouters, a major reason was that after the Civil War, the formally isolated African Americans of the rural South began to interact with the more urban and "sophisticated" communities of the North and began to abandon their traditional Gullah Geechee heritage. The old ways were viewed by many as too provincial or countrified. So, the unique traditions and practices that once defined a people fell into disuse and-- except for a few isolated areas like around the Sea Islands of the Georgia coast-- began to disappear.

**"May be the las' time we shout together."**

**"May be the las' time I don't know."**

**"May be the las' time we shout together."**

**"May be the las' time I don't know."**

**"I don't know, I don't know,**

**may be the las' time, I don't know."**

Just how close did this fundamental African American art form come to disappearing completely from history? In 1983, Doug and Frankie Quimby, prominent and renowned members of the Georgia Sea Island Singers asked writer, artist, and photographer Fred C. Fussell and Southern Music Scholar, George Mitchell, to help locate new participants for the Georgia Sea Island Festival. According to Mr. Fussell, the only surviving Ringshout group they found, "not just on the Georgia /South Carolina coast, but anywhere in the country" was at the Mt. Calvary Baptist Church in the small community of Bolden, near Darien, Georgia. This group, one



of only three surviving area groups today, was recently given the high honor of performing at the opening ceremony of the African American museum in Washington, D.C.

Today, thanks to a renewed interest in preserving, protecting, and promoting our vanishing cultural history, Southeast Georgia Ringshout groups—far from vanishing—have today, not only survived, but gained national fame and international recognition. For, along with the honor mentioned, above, both the Georgia Sea Island Singers and The Geechee Gullah Ring Shouters have performed for the President at the White House and the Geechee Gullah Ring Shouters for the Pope.

So, the next time you hear the clapping of the hands and the tapping of the feet, or the sound of a broom handle pounding out the beat, pause, listen, and then join in. Become part of a living history that--though almost lost forever--survived to provide the cultural foundation for so much of what we call American music today.

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The Gullah Geechee people are the descendants of the enslaved Africans brought from West Africa to work on the rice and indigo plantations from the Cape Fear river in North Carolina to the St John's River in Florida.



Master Gardener, Linda Hlozansky Presents:  
Camellias in our Southern Gardens  
January 22nd at 2:00 p.m. in the office/auditorium  
at Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation.



The Hofwyl–Broadfield historic site is included on Georgia’s Camellia Trail. We have some very old Camellias, and some that are only found here. The presentation will cover the types of Camellias, uses in the landscape, planting, fertilizing, pruning, maintaining, and recognizing/solving problems in our Camellias. Weather permitting, we will visit the garden to solve the mystery of where that hybridized Camellia named “Miss Ophelia Dent” is located. The presentation is available with regular park admission of \$8 for adults, \$7 for seniors. The fee also includes a tour of the plantation house on the hour.



## Easter Egg Scavenger Hunt

Family Fun is available at the park from March 7th– April 9th from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. This fun game features a map and clues to complete the secret phrase or word. There are prizes for turning in your completed map with the correct solution. Call the office for more information.







**Come out and select a spot to paint on the vast lawn or under a live oak tree. Hofwyl-Broadfield welcomes artists of all ages to enjoy an early spring day at the park.**

**Cost: \$ 25.00**

**Mail or check to:**

**Friends of Hofwyl-Broadfield**

**P.O box 1801, Brunswick, GA 31520**

**Be sure to include your name and email with your check.**



**The Friends of  
Hofwyl-Broadfield  
Present  
Albert Fendig's  
Plein Air Artist Event  
for the 11th Season  
Come paint with us!  
March 25, 2023**

**9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.**



**For more information contact  
George Netherton :**

**By phone at:**

**678-778-8889**

**Or email at:**

**[gnetherton@comcast.net](mailto:gnetherton@comcast.net)**