



# THE ST. AUGUSTINE REPORT

Local news in our Nation's Oldest City



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## St. Paul's to take over Echo House

Pending approval by our City Commission, Lincolnville's historic Echo House will be transferred from its trusteeship to St. Paul AME Church.

St. Paul Pastor Ron Rawls is awaiting deed transfer paperwork from the Echo House Board of Trustees, headed by Carlotta and Tony Miles, heirs of the late Rosalie Gordon Mills. Commission approval is expected to be sought in February.

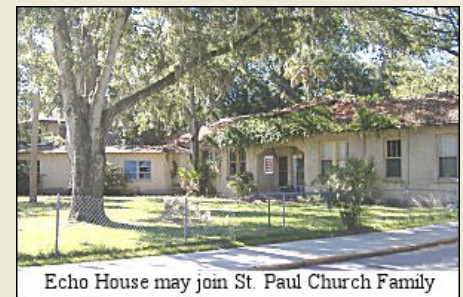
The city is involved through a reverter clause in the deed if the property is not maintained for non-profit services.

Meanwhile the vacant property, originally the Buckingham Smith Nursing Home, goes before our Code Enforcement Board January 12 with a progress report after being tagged last October as unsafe.

For many years it was maintained by Mrs. Mills, and her heirs have struggled to make improvements, but they live in Washington DC and have been unable to maintain a hands-on effort.

Reverend Rawls said Echo House, across Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue from his church, is "an ideal fit" with the church's plans for a School of Excellence. "We'd been searching for a location for the school," Rawls said, "so the timing is perfect."

Said Tony Miles, "I'm sure Mrs. Mills would be happy to know that Echo House will be used for educating our young people."



Echo House may join St. Paul Church Family



## Historical Society to revisit General Jorge Biassou

Jane Landers, associate professor of History and past director of the Center for Latin American Studies at Vanderbilt University, will highlight our annual St. Augustine Historical Society meeting January 12 with her study of Jorge Biassou, the black Haitian chieftain who was Spain's highest ranking officer here in the late 18th century.

Landers' numerous works include Black Society in Spanish Florida and The African American Heritage of Florida. Biassou rose to the rank of general, commanded Fort Matanzas 1796-1801, and is buried in an unmarked grave in Tolomato Cemetery.

The Society will also welcome back two trustees - Greg Moore and Paul Thompson - and new trustees Suzanne Booth and Tracy Upchurch, according to the society's January [newsletter](#).



Landers

## \$3 million supports Society

## **British coming Thursday night**

Okay, so he's American, but Tom Jefferson has a lot to say about the British - and will Thursday evening as the 450 Commemoration Commission's *First America* series continues at Flagler College Auditorium. Doors will open at 6, with the program at 7.

Colonial Williamsburg's Bill Barker in Jefferson persona will plead the patriot case before what would have been a hostile audience during St. Augustine's British occupation (1763-1784).

Joining him will be Jesse Fish (our own John Stavelly), an enterprising agent who shuffled properties between the Spanish and British.

Surrounding him will be a British Night Watch living history contingent, which might be less than cordial toward this treasonous visitor.

You can learn more about Barker's representation of Jefferson [here](#).

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## **mission**

The \$3 million sale of 24 Martin Johnson Heade sketches in August, 2007, will be invested to support the Historical Society's "mission of preservation of historic buildings, documents and artifacts of St. Augustine," according to its newsletter.

The sketches were donated to the society by Dr. Wilma Davis in 1944, and while their value increased, costs for security and insurance rose as well.

The investment fund will help support the society's three First Spanish Period buildings and documentary collection on St. Augustine, early Florida, and the colonial southeast and Caribbean.

## **Marker for Los Floridanos**

St. Augustine's Los Floridanos Society is completing plans to add their marker to our city's Historic Marker Program.

The marker will feature the crests of the Solana and Sanchez families and a depiction of Founder Pedro Menendez' landing, and describe "Florida's First Spanish Families 1565-1763."

Manuel Solana and Francisco Sanchez were among the few original Spanish descendants who remained to handle affairs when Florida was ceded to Britain in 1763.

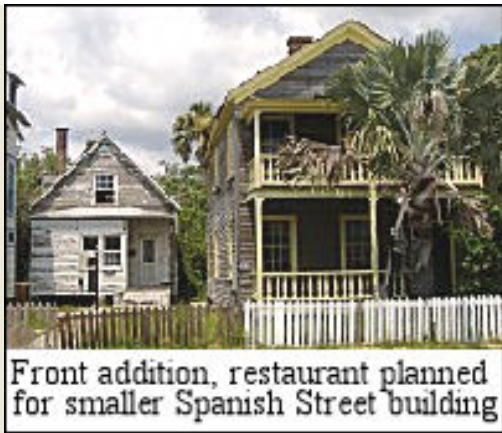
Society President Dick Rousseau anticipates the marker placement on our Visitor Center grounds. His society is funding the damage-resistant laminate marker, which will join others including the Plaza, Lightner/City Hall Building, the La Punta Mission grounds, and two on St. George Street, recognizing our Menorcan heritage and a visit by Frederick Douglass in 1889.



## **City turns to unfinished business**

Our city opens the new year with some unfinished business.

Lincolville's historic Echo House, tagged late last year as unsafe, goes back before our Code Enforcement Board January 12 with a progress report, while on January 21 our Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB) revisits plans for a Flagler College Welcome Center, pedestrian wayfinding signage, fencing around the Plaza's Constitution Monument, and demolition requests for 74 and 76 Spanish Street and the former Casa de La Paz on the bayfront.



The Code Enforcement Board meets at 3 p.m. January 12 and HARB at 2 p.m. January 21, both meetings in the Alcazar Room at City Hall.

### ***Demolition requests***

Property owner George Arnold is expected to propose converting 76 Spanish Street into a restaurant, while presenting figures to support his argument that restoration of the two-story 74 Spanish Street is cost-prohibitive.

His request to demolish the former Casa de la Paz at 22 Avenida Menendez - which he's spent considerable money converting into a private residence - is also up for further review.

### ***Echo House***

Trustees of Echo House were given 30 days to seal up the facility with additional time for more work, after being tagged as an unsafe structure. They'll report on their progress.

### ***Welcome Center***

Flagler College designed a Flagler era center at Cordova and Treasury streets, but HARB, acknowledging our City Commission's decision that construction within Historic Preservation districts should be Spanish colonial style, asked for design modifications. The building site is in an Historic Preservation District, while the college, across Cordova Street, is in the Flagler Model Land Tract.

### ***Wayfinding signage***

HARB will continue review of styles for wayfinding signage in our historic district, part of our Heritage Tourism Signage Program.

### ***Monument fencing***

While fencing around Constitution Monument has been recommended to protect it, at least one HARB member, former Mayor Len Weeks, says the proposed powder-coated aluminum fence in the middle of the plaza is wrong.

### ***History's Highlights***

## ***1740 - British assault on St. Augustine***

*One in a series of historic features as we prepare for our commemorations, drawn from research by George Gardner*

"Unless help can come by June 20, it is the most natural thing in the world that this garrison perish."

It was an urgent dispatch from St. Augustine's Spanish Governor Manuel de Montiano to Havana, as General James Oglethorpe, governor of British Georgia (pictured), tightened his stranglehold on the garrison.



St. Augustine was better prepared for this assault in 1740 than it had been for the siege of 1702.

During 1738, four hundred fresh troops arrived, as well as new iron cannons, funds to build barracks and patrol boats, and 82 laborers. The northern perimeter had been strengthened with the establishment of Fort Mose, manned by fierce-fighting free blacks who'd escaped the shackles of British slavery.

But the garrison's 613 fighting men were still no match for Oglethorpe's 1,600 men, seven warships and 40 dugouts for landing parties.

The British were held off for the better part of two months, their artillery frustrated as its bombardments of the Castillo's soft coquina walls were quickly re-plastered each night to present a fresh, unscarred appearance the next day.

On July 6, Spanish relief ships slipped up the inland waterway through its garrison at

Matanzas Inlet, and by July 20 Oglethorpe's troops had pulled out.

Twenty three years later, the British would finally succeed in taking St. Augustine - not by force, but by the Treaty of Paris of 1763.

**The St. Augustine Report** is published by the Department of Public Affairs of the City of St. Augustine each Tuesday and on Fridays previewing City Commission meetings. The Report is written and distributed by George Gardner, former St. Augustine Mayor (2002-2006) and Commissioner (2006-2008) and a longtime newspaper reporter and editor. Contact The Report at [gardner@aug.com](mailto:gardner@aug.com)

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