

Island History

Enjoy The Unspoiled Natural Beauty Of Our Jekyll Island Resort And Club

Our historic Jekyll Island resort and club is located off the Georgia coast, midway between Savannah, Georgia and Jacksonville, Florida. Situated between St. Simons Island and Cumberland Island, Jekyll is a short drive from the town of Brunswick and boasts of a salt marsh characteristic of the southeastern seaboard and a beach with the Atlantic Ocean lapping its shores. At 5,700 acres and a 33% limit on business development, Jekyll is the smallest of Georgia's barrier islands, yet resplendent with moss draped live oaks, marshes and remote beaches with natural sand dunes and indigenous wildlife.

Jekyll Island was purchased by the state of Georgia in 1947, and it became the Jekyll Island State Park. It was operated under the state park system until 1950, when it was transferred to the auspices of the Jekyll Island Authority (JIA), more able to operate as a business. The JIA board of directors is appointed by the governor of Georgia.

Native American Settlement



The mystique surrounding this Jekyll Island luxury resort is not limited to its reputation for being an opulent playground for the nation's elite during the turn of the century. Jekyll Island itself is ripe with a diverse history all its own. As early as 2,500 B.C., Jekyll Island has been attracting visitors, beginning with small groups of hunter-gatherers seeking the island's abundant natural resources. They were followed in 1540 A.D. by the Guale Indians, a tribe known for inhabiting a number of Georgia's barrier islands. The Spanish called Jekyll Isla De Ballenas meaning "Whale Island" because even today the St. Andrew's Sound south of Jekyll Island is a whale breeding ground. European presence can be traced back to the late sixteenth century with strong archival evidence that the Spanish at least explored and had contact with the native peoples of the island, but it was the English, however, who were the first to establish any sort of European settlement.

Colonial Period



In 1733, James Oglethorpe and the passengers aboard the Anne established the English colony of Georgia on Yamacraw Bluff on the Savannah River (between Georgia and South Carolina). In 1734, General Oglethorpe renamed the island in tribute to his friend, Sir Joseph Jekyll, an English politician. The colony grew rapidly, and an immediate conflict developed with their Spanish neighbors in Florida. Oglethorpe quickly dispatched thirty recruits led by William Horton to construct the town and defenses at Frederica on St. Simons Island. After proving himself on St. Simons, Horton was granted 500 acres of land by the Trustees of the colony, and in April 1736 he ventured over to Jekyll Island to stake his claim. Horton died in 1748 and the remains of his house, built of a mixture of lime, sand and oyster shells (tabby), are among the oldest structures in Georgia. Over the next forty years, Jekyll had a number of different owners, ranging from personal entities to a group of Frenchmen called the Sapelo Company.

19th Century



Slaves were imported to pick cotton, which was the primary agricultural product on the island during this time. The U.S. government banned the importation of slaves in 1807, but smuggling still continued. On November 29, 1858, the Wanderer unloaded 409 slaves on Jekyll Island, one of the last cargoes of slaves imported into the United States. Those involved in the activities of the Wanderer were indicted by the federal government.

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Club History

A Rich Tradition Of Hospitality At This Grand Georgia Historic Hotel Landmark

At the turn of the century, tycoons, politicians, and socialites flocked to Jekyll Island to revel in their own luxury and America's burgeoning wealth. Our historic Georgia Club was described in the February 1904 issue of Munsey's Magazine as "the richest, the most exclusive, the most inaccessible club in the world." Its impressive members included such luminaries as J.P. Morgan, William Rockefeller, Vincent Astor, Joseph Pulitzer, William K. Vanderbilt, and other recognizable names on the roster were Macy, Goodyear, and Gould.

A Historic Georgia Site With An Aristocratic Past

Development



It all started with a little-known, but extraordinary man named Newton Finney, who served briefly on Robert E. Lee's staff as captain of engineers during the Civil War. Newton Finney and his brother-in-law, John Eugene DuBignon, were the early developers whose plan for a hunting club for wealthy northerners hatched into the most exclusive social club in the United States. Between 1879 and 1885, the two men worked on acquiring ownership of this Georgia historic landmark and convincing investors of the merits of the idea. Finney lived in New York and, having connections to members of such institutions as the Union Club, the so-called "mother of clubs," he carefully built the membership and early foundations for the Club. After Dubignon, the lone original member from the south, purchased the island, he in turn sold it to the newly incorporated Jekyll Island Club and its original 53 members/investors, among whom were Marshall Field, Henry Hyde, J.P. Morgan, Joseph Pulitzer and William K. Vanderbilt.

Architecture



Ground was broken for the Clubhouse in mid-August 1886, and the club officially opened its doors in January 1888. Designed by Charles Alexander of Chicago, the original clubhouse reflects the Queen Anne style, incorporating into its plan the turret which dominates the roof line, extensive verandas, bay windows, extended chimneys and, overall, an asymmetrical design. Handsome interior details include Ionic columns in the dining room, twelve- and fifteen-foot ceilings, oak wainscoting and other intricately detailed woodwork, as well as leaded art glass and ninety-three distinctively detailed fireplaces.

Historical Events



Because of the concentration of internationally prominent business leaders, the Jekyll Island Club has been the scene of some important historical events, such as the first transcontinental telephone call placed by AT&T president Theodore Vail on January 25, 1915.

Finance, as well as politics, was of paramount concern to many club members. J.P. Morgan could create or quell economic panics on Wall Street with the financial resources at his personal command. George Baker, head of the First National Bank of New York, and James Stillman, head of the National City Bank of New York, also members of the Jekyll Island Club, were nearly as wealthy as Morgan. In 1907 when a particularly virulent economic panic caused a run on the banks, one of these three men paved the way for a secret meeting on Jekyll. Traveling under assumed names, Senator Nelson Aldrich, four other bankers of national importance, and the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury made their way to Jekyll posing as duck hunters. Meetings the following week led to the development of the Aldrich Plan, which called for a centralized banking structure for the country. Although Congress did not pass the plan in 1912, President Woodrow Wilson and others used the Aldrich Plan as the basis for another plan that became the Federal Reserve Act, establishing the Federal Reserve System.

Social Life



With the advent of the first “season” on Jekyll, the elite club members gathered their families and boarded their yachts, all with expectations for having a grandiose time. Morning hunting trips, lawn parties, carriage rides, leisurely afternoons on the beach...the likes of the Vanderbilts and the Rockefellers passed their summer days in a state of lavish splendor on their Southern playground. For years there was unofficial competition among the yachting members to see who would arrive in the most impressive and beautifully appointed vessel. Dinner each evening, however, was the high point of the day as the dining room grew rich with white-clad waiters, bow-tied gentlemen and stately women.

The Cottages

Between 1888 and 1928 these wealthy northern families built their winter homes, or “cottages” as they were called, designed to house entire families with staff. Hardly cottages, they exemplified Victorian tastes in architecture. Two of these have been restored and are part of the Jekyll Island Club’s historic accommodations.



Among them is Sans Souci, meaning “without care,” which was built in 1896 and owned in part by J.P. Morgan. This six-unit building is considered to be one of the first condominiums built in this country. The floors, leaded art glass, stairway and skylight are all original.



Crane Cottage, in the style of Italian Renaissance, was built in 1917 for Richard Teller Crane, Jr. and his wife. It is the largest, most lavish of the cottages and has a landscaped formal sunken garden with fountains and upper terrace.



Cherokee Cottage, as beautiful as the wild rose for which it was named, is also Italian Renaissance architectural style. Constructed in 1904, the cottage reflects the tastes of the Shrady family for whom it was originally built. The three arched, double front doors welcome guests into a light, spacious great room, and its ten accommodations express a life of elegant leisure.

Several other cottages that have been restored, but are not part of the Hotel, are open to the public. The Indian Mound Cottage, built with twenty-five rooms for the Rockefeller family, and the Goodyear Cottage completed in 1906 by the firm of Carrère and Hastings are two examples.

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Hotel History

A Legendary Name In Jekyll Island Hotels



The Jekyll Island Club flourished into the 1930s, but world events took their toll. With the advent of World War I, several members offered their personal yachts to the war effort as well as financial assistance. The Great Depression began to change people's priorities, and in two year's time, half the Club's membership dropped away. The final blow to the life of the Club, however, was World War II and the threat of enemy submarines just off the coast, inducing the U.S. government's order to evacuate the island. The Club's president hoped to reopen after the war, but in 1947 the state of Georgia entered the picture, buying the entire island for \$675,000 in order to turn the once prestigious and influential island retreat into a public state park. Several Club properties, leased from the state of Georgia by an investment firm, have been restored and transformed into one of the finest luxury getaway hotels in America, the Jekyll Island Club Hotel.

A Jekyll Island Georgia Historic Hotel Restored To Former Grandeur



Guests visiting our Jekyll Island hotel today may have dinner in the Grand Dining Room, where former members enjoyed each other's company as well as exquisitely prepared meals. Over delicate entrées and world-class wine, they made significant decisions, admired the room's beautiful leaded art glass and classical details, and vied for social position. The room suggests a visit to the Club for the "season" in the early 1900s.

Whether guests' primary interest is architecture, history or leisure, they will love their visit to this grand Jekyll Island Georgia hotel, a Victorian treasure. More than fifty activities are available, allowing you to immerse yourself in the former glory of the Club and island: [historic tours](#), [croquet](#), [carriage rides](#), [tennis](#), [golf](#), [airplane fly-ins](#), [yacht docking](#), [private beachfront](#) (chairs and umbrellas), sea shell and [bird walks](#) on deserted beaches, [horseback riding](#), and walks in the [live oak forests](#).

Relic of Georgia's Colonial Past

The ruins of the Horton House on [Jekyll Island](#) stand as a silent reminder of Georgia's rich colonial history.

When General James Oglethorpe arrived in Georgia during the 1730s and planted English settlements including Savannah and [Fort Frederica](#), he implemented a plan that called for rapid expansion, fortification and settlement of the Georgia coast. As part of this effort, Major William Horton settled on Jekyll Island and built the stout structure that can still be today.

The second in command of Oglethorpe's regiment, Major Horton cleared fields, built a barn and engaged in other activities on the northern end of Jekyll Island. He is credited with cutting the first road across the island, a

sandy lane that can still be traveled today.

The house was built of tabby, a unique material commonly used along the Georgia coast during the 18th and 19th centuries. To create tabby, Horton burned oyster shells to obtain lime. He then mixed the lime with equal parts of sand, water and water. The thick mixture was poured into forms to create the walls that stand today.

The Spanish were infuriated by the English activity in Georgia as they claimed the coastal islands as their own territory. Spanish missions had once stood throughout the region. The outraged governor of St. Augustine took advantage of the War of Jenkins Ear to move north with a large military force intent on driving Oglethorpe and his followers away.

The Spanish struck at [St. Simons Island](#), but were defeated at the [Battle of Gully Hole Creek](#) and the [Battle of Bloody Marsh](#). Even so, they inflicted as much damage as possible to English settlements in the area before withdrawing back to sea. The Horton House on Jekyll Island was among their targets during the 1742 raid.

The house was burned, along with Horton's barn and other structures. By the time the campaign ended, nothing but smoking tabby ruins stood on the north end of Jekyll Island.

The two-story house was rebuilt after the Spanish raid. The family of Poulain du Bignon moved in after the American Revolution and continued to operate the old Horton plantation on Jekyll Island. Du Bignon was a French officer and lived on the island until his death decades later.

Sea Island Cotton and other crops were grown on the plantation until the land was acquired by the Jekyll Island Club in 1886. The property then transitioned from an

agricultural area to a playground for the rich and powerful.

The Horton House once again fell into ruin and today only the time-scarred walls stand as a reminder of the thriving activity that once buzzed on the north end of Jekyll Island from around 1740 to 1886. The ruins have been designated as the Horton House Historic Site and are maintained by the [Jekyll Island Historic District](#).

The site is open to the public daily and includes the ruins, historical plaques and markers and the historic DuBignon Cemetery across the road. The paved path near the cemetery offers beautiful views of the Marshes of Glynn, made famous during the 19th century by the poet Sidney Lanier.

Horton House Historic Site is located on North Riverview Drive north of the main historic district. There is no cost to visit other than the admission to access the island.