



# Rice Paper

The Newsletter of the LeConte-Woodmanston Foundation January 2010

## Saving Woodmanston=Sharing Legacies + Preserving History

I often find myself telling people that I am so fortunate to have something like LeConte-Woodmanston to feel so passionately about. Some think I'm crazy, especially when they find out I'm a volunteer, but that's okay. Most, those who have discovered Woodmanston and share the visions for its future, understand completely.

Why is this particular historical site so important? The answer is that it comes with a number of legacies, speaking to a diversity of people and interests.

In the beginning was a black water swamp providing headwaters to the South Newport River and hunting and fishing habitat for Native Americans.

The Europeans arrived with those they enslaved for cultivating rice...and canals, dikes and roads were constructed to control water levels. Virgin forests were cleared and the resulting fields tilled and planted.

A Revolutionary War happened and coastal rice planters fended themselves against British attacks. The first home at Woodmanston was destroyed by fire during that war and the plantation's "hunting lodge" became the primary domicile of the LeConte family when in Georgia.

Indian attacks however, were a constant threat and the lodge was fortified and armed accordingly. One raid resulted in the capture of five of the plantation slaves who did not make it inside the fortress in time. Three of these made their way back eventually. In 1809, Louis LeConte assumed

management of the plantation when he married into the Midway Quarterman family. He and his brother, John Eatton LeConte, Jr., established the first botanical garden in Georgia at Woodmanston. A century later, it was written that these gardens were a "proving ground for plants disseminated throughout the South today." The first camellia shipment to America was three Alba Plenas, two of which came to Woodmanston, according to Louis' daughter Jane LeConte Harden.

*"...the best kept secret on the coast of Georgia, is the public access to those historic dikes constructed 175-250 years ago by slave labor."*



*Rice will grow again in Bulltown Swamp...weather permitting.*

By 1832, the gardens were also regarded as the "most luxuriant in bulbs" by one world traveler, with a list of 35 varieties documented as early as 1818.

Then there were the LeContes themselves, respected scientists and explorers, lovers of all things natural, lending their name to flora, fauna and

geological features throughout America. Much of this love of natural sciences was likely fostered in Bulltown Swamp where flora and fauna abound, and in the attic laboratories at Woodmanston.

But the most compelling thing about LeConte-Woodmanston for me, and the best kept secret on the coast of Georgia, is the public access to those historic dikes constructed 175-250 years ago by slave labor. The nature trails through Bulltown Swamp take us over those dikes, though the eerily beautiful blackwater swamp, where people once toiled under the bonds of slavery, an incredible memorial, and rarely experienced even from lifelong Liberty County residents.

It's a magical place, with colonial history, the story of the LeContes, their passions and accomplishments, and that of the Africans and their descendants, their bondage and labors during a time and a people we are ill-equipped to judge 150 years later.

Since 1971 and the rediscovery of the plantation, Woodmanston has been a volunteer effort to simply keep the place open to the public or from reverting back to the wilds. If Woodmanston is to survive, however, and become a place that matters to the community and the region, as well as a draw for tourism to Liberty County, operational funds are needed now. A staff must be hired to bring plans designed to secure the site to fruition. Our volunteers can only accomplish so much, and funds are limited.

Come discover Woodmanston, fall in love, make it your own, and then find a way to help in its survival.

-Mary Beth Evans

*Executive Director & Volunteer*

# 2009- The Year in Review

It was a year of programs and projects. Super Saturdays were launched in January 2009, culminating with the Swamp Critters summer program. This was made possible by grants from the Savannah Presbytery M.K. Pentecost Fund and the Target Corporation, advertising by the Liberty County Convention & Tourism Bureau, and the work of dozens of volunteers.

A public access picnic grove was constructed at the entrance to LeConte-Woodmanston, thanks to a grant secured by Coastal Georgia Greenway. This is also a "hot spot," so when the weather warms, pack a lunch and your computer and enjoy the beautiful new setting.

Construction began on "The Walk" memorial pathway before rains, heat and bugs drove us indoors for the summer. Much additional funding and volunteer labor is needed to proceed. We will commemorate the memorial in December 2010.

Trail improvements have begun with funds provided by our neighbors, Plum Creek Timber. A boardwalk through the bog garden is now complete...another boardwalk, some bridges and benches will be constructed this year.

We enjoyed another partnership in the fall with the Savannah College of Art and Design on our chapel planned for 2011-2012. Students created two "temporal" memorials to those enslaved at Woodmanston and elsewhere. These structures will eventually succumb to the elements

and rejoin nature. Much thought was given to these works of art and are fascinating to behold.

We have embarked on the "Great Camellia Hunt" having committed to planting all those 550 Georgia cultivars we can locate. This has led to the "rescue" of other gardens rich in camellias in the region that risk destruction. A nursery has been established on site to nurture cuttings and transplants before planting in the gardens. Area Master Gardeners and other volunteers as well as like-minded organizations are helping with this and the formal gardens restoration. Our camellia rescue project and our plans for expanding the botanical gardens has

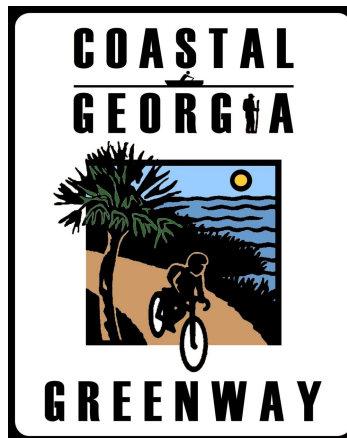
said to be \$20.45 per hour, but I don't believe a price can be assessed...if volunteers didn't come forward, we would not be here today. Inventories of birds and native trees and plants at Woodmanston for the past year, have been conducted by Ranger Andy from Hofwyl Plantation and others. A coloring book of the flora and fauna at Woodmanston and Bulltown Swamp is being produced for distribution with a grant provided by Target Corporation.

Making donations, purchasing items from our gift store, or remitting membership dues just became easier. Credit card payments can be made on line or by sending or phoning in your card information using the enclosed remittance envelope.

*For questions or comments regarding material in this newsletter, contact:*

*Mary Beth Evans, Executive Director  
LeConte-Woodmanston Foundation, Inc.  
P.O. Box 179  
Midway, GA 31320*

*912-884-6500  
Or email:  
mbevans@leconte-woodmanston.org*



*Super Saturdays and "Swamp Critters" brought families to Woodmanston in 2009.*

qualified us for membership in the Great Gardens of America Preservation Alliance.

Volunteers put in thousands of hours in 2009 including administrative, web site management, networking, grant writing, gardening and just plain hard labor. The value of a volunteer to a non-profit organization is



*Riceboro churches' Vacation Bible School made us some very charming new friends!*



# 2010 Promises to be an Interesting and E xtremely Busy Year!

We have a few irons in the fire for 2010: On Saturday, January 30th, at 10:30, volunteers and Foundation board members will be pushing up their sleeves for a work day. Gathering fallen debris, transplanting and planting, pruning and whatever else needs to be done will be the entertainment that day. A chili lunch and refreshments will be provided.

New volunteers are always welcome to lend a hand. Target Corporation is funding the "Children's Garden- Beginning to End" at



A new boardwalk is completed over a bog garden.

Woodmanston beginning in Spring 2010 and culminating with a harvest dinner for participants and their families in the fall. This will be an education in "sustainable" gardening. Students from Midway Middle School are being invited to participate. Volunteers will be needed and the community is welcome to come, observe and learn. Watch our website for more information.

The hunting down and propagation of camellias will continue through 2010. Many of those varieties we seek will be

coming to us as new or first year cuttings. Established cuttings will need to be transferred to 3-gallon pots for another year of nurturing. Transplanting a camellia, even from an "at risk" garden is a last resort, and costly and risky besides.

We are often asked when we will be having another plant sale. Good news! The Annual Fall Plant Sale is back on the second Saturday in October. We will also have a bean soup and cornbread lunch to help get you in mood for fall and planting!

**Reserve the dates:  
December 11th &  
December 12th**

The LeConte-Woodmanston Foundation Board of Directors has been discussing the launching of an annual signature event. We've determined that a December festival might be the best timed and suitable to showcase what we are and what we know about life at Woodmanston in the early half of the 19th Century.

On the evening before, we will commemorate "The Walk-an African American Tribute" memorial walkway, with a luminary, guest speakers, refreshments and entertainment.

If all our hopes for this new year are realized, we will have two full-time, paid staffers and a full-time gardener. Funding or donations of materials and labor will see the memorial walkway completed and the Bulltown Environmental Education Pavilion enclosed. Oprah and Bill and Ted will "discover" Liberty County and hundred dollar bills will rain from the skies. Residents will come to realize what an absolute treasure exists at Woodmanston and in Liberty County itself and will be climbing over each other to volunteer to help places like Fort Morris, Dorchester Academy, LeConte-Woodmanston...

Best wishes for your new year too!



An endangered Camellia sasanqua finds a new home at Woodmanston.

## Major Funding & Support in 2009 was provided by:



Plum Creek



The Heritage Bank



TARGET.

Liberty County Convention & Tourism Bureau




# Upcoming Events




**January 30                      10:30-2:00      Volunteer/Board Workday and Chili Luncheon!**

## **Saturday, February 20th -Annual Meeting-Low Country Boil and Raffle**

The ever popular Low Country Boil/Annual Meeting is back at LeConte-Woodmanston! All members in good standing, with paid 2010 dues, are invited to attend. The meeting will begin at 11:00 a.m. and Cindye Jones from Liberty County Convention & Visitors Bureau will be our guest speaker. Dinner will be served afterwards at a cost of \$20.00 per person. Reservation and payment must be made by February 10th.



<b>March-November</b>	<b>Dates TBA</b>	<b>Children's Garden Program</b>
<b>October 16</b>	<b>10:00-1:00</b>	<b>Fall Plant &amp; Bake Sale</b>
<b>December 11</b>	<b>6:00 p.m.</b>	<b>"The Walk" Memorial Dedication</b>
<b>December 12</b>	<b>1:00-5:00</b>	<b>"Noel! Noel! Christmas with the LeContes" Colonial/Wild Game Dinner/Entertainment</b>



The LeConte-Woodmanston Foundation  
P.O. Box 179  
Midway, GA 31320

Website: [www.leconte-woodmanston.org](http://www.leconte-woodmanston.org)  
Email: [info@leconte-woodmanston.org](mailto:info@leconte-woodmanston.org)  
Office: 912-884-6500