Hilton Head Island
Bluffton and the Lowcountry

Living History

The Heritage Library Foundation offers a fascinating glimpse into the past.

There's more to Hilton Head Island than pristine beaches and championship golf courses. There's an incredible history, and at the Heritage Library it comes alive.

EXPLORE YOUR ROOTS

Devoted to historic research and genealogy, the Heritage Library is operated by the Heritage Library Foundation. Its shelves hold over 4,000 volumes of history and genealogy, including a large collection on the Civil War. Family researchers at the library can also access the principal on-line subscription services. Here members receive personal attention and help from a staff of forty volunteers; non-members may also get research assistance for a modest daily fee.

Tracing your family's roots can often be surprising and always fascinating. The Heritage Library is the Lowcountry's authorized branch facility of the Family History Library of Salt Lake City; their microfilms can be viewed at the library.

Need more guidance? The Heritage Library offers classes and workshops for beginning researchers as well as more advanced classes. They include an introductory class, and workshops on online research, family tree software, and the use of censuses.

HISTORY COMES ALIVE

Visitors to Hilton Head Island may be surprised to learn of its rich history, especially the role the island played in the Civil War. Early in the war, Union army and naval forces captured Hilton Head, posted some forty thousand troops on the island, built a hospital, storehouses, and a pier for coaling the ships blockading Confederate shipping. Since the Lowcountry was the cradle of the southern rebellion, lectures at the library explore its role leading up to and during the Civil War.

PHOTOS BY HERITAGE LIBRARY FOUNDATION

Above: Zion Chapel of Ease Cemetery. Left: A library volunteer helps Girl Scouts write their family histories. Opposite page: Board member Dr. James Rose is an expert on African-American genealogy.

Other lectures further explore the island's entire history, from the Ice Ages to the island's ceremonial function for visiting Indians, to eventual colonization, to the development of the Gullah culture on the post-bellum isolated island, and to the re-awakening of the island once a bridge connected it to the mainland. The subsequent development has become a widely-praised ecological model.

For history researchers, the library has transcribed and digitized old local records such as post-Civil-War censuses, land records, and plantation histories.

Visitors may also tour two of the island's most significant historic sites, owned and maintained by the Foundation, and open during the daylight hours. Both are peaceful havens where ancient live oaks, dripping with Spanish moss, tower overhead.

Fort Mitchel, an earthwork fort created in 1862, is now inside Hilton Head Plantation, close to that plantation's Cypress Gate; just tell the gate attendant you want to go there. You'll find an interesting self-guided walking tour.

Just off William Hilton Parkway, the Zion Chapel of Ease Cemetery is all that remains from the island's first Episcopal Church, built circa 1786 to serve the needs of the local planters. The chapel was destroyed in 1868, but visitors can still wander the cemetery and see the markers of local patriots who fought in the American Revolution. Don't miss the large granite Baynard Mausoleum. Built in 1846, the mausoleum is Hilton Head's oldest remaining structure.

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