



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in "Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms" (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name FIRST AFRICAN BAPTIST CHURCH AT RACCOON BLUFF
other names/site number Raccoon Bluff Church

2. Location

street & number N/A
city, town SAPELO ISLAND (N/A) vicinity of
county McIntosh code GA 191
state Georgia code GA zip code 31327

() not for publication

3. Classification

Ownership of Property:

- () private
- () public-local
- (X) public-state
- () public-federal

Category of Property

- (X) building(s)
- () district
- () site
- () structure
- () object

Number of Resources within Property:

	<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Noncontributing</u>
buildings	1	0
sites	0	0
structures	0	0
objects	0	0
total	1	0

Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Mark R. Edwards

Signature of certifying official

7/17/96

Date

Mark R. Edwards
State Historic Preservation Officer,
Georgia Department of Natural Resources

In my opinion, the property () meets () does not meet the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency or bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

Melvin M. Roy

9/10/90

() determined eligible for the National Register

() determined not eligible for the National Register

() removed from the National Register

() other, explain:

() see continuation sheet

for

Signature, Keeper of the National Register

Date

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

RELIGION/religious facility

Current Functions:

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

MID-19TH CENTURY/Gothic Revival

Materials:

foundation	brick
walls	wood
roof	tin
other	N/A

Description of present and historic physical appearance:

The First African Baptist Church at Raccoon Bluff is one of several African-American historic sites located off the east coast of Georgia on Sapelo Island. The church is located about midway on the eastern side of the island, approximately two miles north of Hog Hammock, also on the east side of the island.

The church is a one- and one-half-story, three-bay, frame church designed in the Gothic Revival style. Built c.1900, the church comprises three sections: the large gable-roofed sanctuary, the west-end, gable-roofed porch with recessed main entrance, and the raised, east-end, gable-roofed choir. The church is set on a concrete-block and brick-pier foundation and clad in weatherboard siding. Double-hung, Queen Anne-style windows of colored glass are located along the sides and end walls and louvered windows in Gothic arches are set in each gable end. The interior of the open-plan sanctuary features wood floors and beaded, tongue-in-groove paneling on the walls and ceiling. Although the bell tower and interior balcony have been removed, the church has changed little since its construction c.1900. All remaining features are historic, as the church has not been altered save for the removal of the original bell tower, church furniture, balcony, and balcony stairs. It is currently unoccupied and in fair condition.

The church is the only standing remnant of the Raccoon Bluff Community remaining on site, which existed from 1871 to the 1960s. Nearby, but off the nominated parcel, is the site of the community, including a chimney from the school, and perhaps a well, as well as numerous sites of the former residences. No study or mapping has been done of this former community.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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The once-thriving Raccoon Bluff community is totally gone, with all historic buildings save this one being removed.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):

ETHNIC HERITAGE-BLACK
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance:

c.1900-1964

Significant Dates:

c.1900

Significant Person(s):

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect(s)/Builder(s):

Unknown

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Significance of property, justification of criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above:

Narrative statement of significance (areas of significance)

The First African Baptist Church at Raccoon Bluff is significant in Ethnic Heritage-Black as one of the few major post-Civil War historic African-American community landmark buildings on Sapelo Island. The First African Baptist Church at Raccoon Bluff, whose congregation dated from 1866, was built at this location after the 1898 hurricane which destroyed many older buildings on the island, and is the only remnant of the oldest black-owned land settlement on the island. Raccoon Bluff was deeded to William Hillary and Co. in 1871, later subdivided among families, and lasted until the early 1960s, when the population was moved to Hog Hammock and all other buildings were moved, dismantled, or demolished. The church building represents one of the two existing African Baptist congregations on the island, its congregation having moved to Hog Hammock in the 1960s to a new church building.

The Church at Raccoon Bluff is also significant in architecture because it is a good example of a turn-of-the-century, modest, Gothic Revival-style, African-American church building and a historic community landmark building, the only church to serve the large, Raccoon Bluff community from c.1900-1960s. The church retains features of the Gothic Revival style: windows in Gothic arches in each gable end. The church also retains the three main areas of the church plan: the large gable-roofed sanctuary, the west-end, gable-roofed porch with recessed main entrance, and the raised, east-end, gable-roofed choir. There are also early, double-hung, Queen Anne-style windows located along the sides and end walls. It also retains original wood floors and beaded, tongue-in-groove paneling on the walls and ceiling. All of these original materials are the product of local craftsmen.

National Register Criteria

This church meets National Register Criterion A because it is associated with the African-American religious movement, being the focal point for the Raccoon Bluff community after its construction in c.1900. This was the only church, in effect the town church, for this, the largest community on Sapelo Island. It would have been the center for their religious and social events, such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. It also meets National Register Criterion C because it is a

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good architectural example of the use of local craftsmen, available materials including some said to be from other buildings, to create a traditional, rural, Baptist church with some Gothic Revival elements remaining, especially in the gable-end louvered windows. It still retains the altar area, the colored glass windows, the two rear doors, and the look and feel of a church.

Criteria Considerations (if applicable)

This church meets Criteria Consideration A because it is a religious structure which derives its importance from having been the only church for the largest African-American community or town on Sapelo Island for over fifty years and also for being today the only remaining extant building from that community and thus to represent that community, which was the oldest African-American ownership of land on the island, dating from 1871. It derives its primary significance from its historical importance as a community center, and for its architectural value.

Period of significance (justification)

The period of significance is from the construction of this church c. 1900 until the congregation was moved into the new church at Hog Hammock in the early 1960s and Raccoon Bluff as a community, for which this was the only church, and the last remaining structure, was dissolved.

Contributing/Noncontributing Resources (explanation, if necessary)

This church is the only property being nominated on this piece of land and is a historic, contributing building.

Developmental history/historic context (if applicable)

Sapelo Island appears to have been continuously occupied for more than 4,000 years. As an island, it has provided a well-defined geographic environment for the various civilizations that have made it their home. Sapelo's four millennia of history are marked by several distinct periods of occupation, by different groups of people, with distinct cultures. Each has left its mark on the island in the form of the landscape, archaeological sites, and historic buildings and structures.

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Initially Sapelo Island was settled by Native Americans, as long as 4,000 years ago. For more than three millennia, a succession of American Indian cultures developed on the island, associated with developments on the mainland. The most significant and visible remains from the pre-European era is the Shell Ring located on the northwest side of Sapelo on the North End tract. (Juengst, p. 61)

Europeans first appeared on the scene in the early 16th century. The Spanish, with their African slaves and servants, established garrisons and missions along the southeast coast, including San Jose de Zapala which was established on Sapelo, although its exact location is unknown. (Worth; and Juengst, p. 35ff) After the Spanish left in 1688 there was an interregnum of sorts until the English formed a permanent colony in what is now Georgia in 1733.

After King George II of Great Britain granted a charter in 1732 to the Trustees for the Founding of the Colony of Georgia, English settlers led by James Edward Oglethorpe arrived and settled Savannah in 1733. Sapelo was not legally a part of the English colony of Georgia due to an agreement with the Native Americans and especially with Mary Musgrove who had aided Oglethorpe and the early colony. Mary Musgrove, then the wife of an Indian trader, had aided Oglethorpe as an interpreter and in his negotiations with the Indians. It was not until the late 1750s that the British crown and its representatives in Georgia finally settled Mary Musgrove (by then Bosomworth)'s claims, granted her St. Catherine's Island, after which she released her claim on Ossabaw and Sapelo. The latter two islands were auctioned by the colony of Georgia on May 17, 1760. (Coleman, I, pp. 96-97)

The Island of Sapelo was purchased at the 1760 sale by Grey Elliott, who was a colonial officer serving as surveyor and auditor general and later on the governor's council and as speaker of the House. In 1762 he sold Sapelo to Patrick Mackay (c.1700-1777), an Indian agent, planter, and a major figure in colonial Georgia. (Coleman, II, p. 672) He owned and operated the entire island as a cotton plantation during the late colonial period. It was under his widow Isabella's ownership during the American Revolution. In 1784, the Mackays' heirs sold the entire island to John McQueen (1751-1807), also known as Don Juan McQueen after he fled Georgia due to bad debts to live in Florida, where he later died.

McQueen owned Sapelo for only five years, 1784-1789, when he sold the entire island and the use of his slaves there to Francois Dumoussay (1754-1794), a Frenchman from Paris, who set about establishing The Sapelo Company made up of five Frenchmen who were looking to invest in land and to make money from operating cotton and beef plantations on the island. The Sapelo Company owned numerous slaves and when the

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company folded and the investors or their heirs were forced to sell the company's assets (by then divided), the slaves were sold with the land parcels. One of the company's major farming activities was raising cattle, as had the Mackays earlier, but the French also grew cotton, especially on nearby Jekyll Island, which they also owned. One artifact of this era is the marble tombstone of Dumoussay which remains on the island, temporarily located at the Marine Institute. It is known from letters that the Frenchmen lived in a few frame houses which did not long survive. (Thomas, Kenneth H., Jr.)

The legacy of the French era was that the island was divided into several plantations which forever affected the island's land ownership history. The half-century from the dissolution of the French Sapelo Company (1794) until the unity of most of the island under the ownership of Thomas Spalding and his children (1843) includes many different owners.

At the end of the French era, the island was divided into several separate plantations because of the sale of the different French estates. Dumoussay's estate included Blackbeard Island, which until its sale in 1800 was legally considered part of Sapelo. Its sale to the U.S. Government made it the second oldest Federally-owned property in the United States. Today it is a National Wildlife Refuge. The rest of Dumoussay's share was 400 acres at the North End near High Point.

Overview: The Island as Four Plantations and the Lighthouse

From the end of the French era, in which they owned the entire island up until the 1790s, and the advent of Howard Coffin in 1912, who purchased all of the island except for the black settlements, the island's history is best covered by discussing the five separate divisions: North End, South End, Kenan Tract, Raccoon Bluff, and the Lighthouse Tract. These were the areas of ownership at the time of the death in 1851 of Thomas Spalding, the major plantation figure in the history of Sapelo.

The North End (1794-1912)

After the death of Dumoussay and the dissolution of the Frenchmen's Sapelo Company, the rest of the North End, as the northern part of the island was called, virtually a half, was owned in part by Jean Baptiste Mocquet, the self-styled the Marquis de Montalet (1760-1814), a French refugee from Haiti; later by Gen. Francis Hopkins (c.1772-1821) and for a long time by Capt. Edward Swarbreck (c.1760-1844), a Catholic, English-born sea captain. Swarbreck eventually bought out the other interests of several of the French estates and of the Hopkins and Montalet estates and ran a cotton plantation from the

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Chocolate homesite on the west side of the island. The surviving tabby ruins of the Chocolate Plantation, his homesite, were built c.1818-1820 during his ownership. (Hopkins) Swarbreck also owned property in Savannah. He sold the North End/Chocolate Plantation to Dr. Charles W. Rogers (1780-1849) who lived there about 15 years before he sold out to Thomas Spalding c.1843. All of these early 19th century owners operated the North End as a cotton plantation and owned many slaves. The physical remains of the Chocolate Plantation: the main house, commissary, barn and slave houses are one of the largest remains on the Georgia coast of tabby buildings. These ruins and one other major tabby building on the east side of the island at Bourbon Field are the visible, above-ground resources on the North End dating from this early period.

Around 1843, Thomas Spalding, the major antebellum planter associated with Sapelo Island, bought the North End from Dr. Rogers, who then moved to Bryan County, where he is buried. Spalding gave the plantation to his newly-married son, Randolph. Randolph Spalding (1822-1862), then only 21, moved here with his bride and lived at the Chocolate Plantation until shortly after the death of his father in 1851, when he and his family moved to the South End (Big) House.

Placenames associated with the North End of the island are: High Point, Chocolate Plantation on the west side, Bourbon Field on the east side; and the Shell Ring (once called Spanish Fort, already mentioned).

In 1866, after the Civil War and the death of Randolph Spalding in 1862 in the midst of the war, his widow, Mary Bass Spalding, sold the North End to John N. A. Griswold (1821-1909) of Newport, Rhode Island who also owned land on St. Simons. He visited there only a few times, choosing to rent the cotton plantation to other island planters. After ownership was lost to one of his Northern creditors, and sold again, the North End was sold in 1881 to Amos Sawyer (1830-1913) of Northampton, Massachusetts, a soap manufacturer, whose sister, Priscilla, was married to David C. Barrow, Sr., for whose children she had originally been governess. Barrow was one of the Southern relatives of the Spalding family, owners of the South End.

In 1885, Amos Sawyer sold three parcels of land cut from the North End to African-Americans on the island. Lumber Landing, a 60-acre tract on the southwest side of the North End, was sold to Ceasar Sams (c.1842-1907). It remained in his family until 1956. Sawyer sold Belle Marsh, a 50-acre tract on the west side of the island, to Joseph Jones. His descendants were the Walker family who owned and lived there until 1950. The third tract, sold to James Green, was on the east side of

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the island, just north of Raccoon Bluff. It reverted to Sawyer in 1890.

In 1896, Clarence B. Moore, of Philadelphia, made a trip to Georgia to discover, excavate, and record archaeological sites. He visited Sapelo, and recorded information about the prehistoric Shell Ring, located on the North End. He published his findings in **Certain Aboriginal Mounds of the Georgia Coast** (1897).

The 7,000 acres at North End remained in Sawyer's family until its sale in 1912 to Howard Coffin. There are no visible, above-ground, post-Civil War remains from the Griswold-Sawyer ownership of the North End, although it is known that there was a Griswold-Sawyer residence there to which the latter and his family came seasonally as late as the 1890s. (**Darien Gazette**)

Raccoon Bluff/The Street Place (1794-1871); as a community (1871-1964)

Raccoon Bluff/The Street Place. This 1,000 acre tract on the east side of the island came out of the French Sapelo Island Company presumably into the ownership of the heirs of Mr. Picot de Boisfeuillet, one of the five Frenchmen of The Sapelo Company. At his death in 1800, his Sapelo land went jointly to his four children. By the 1820s, his Sapelo lands were divided, with the part that became known as the Raccoon Bluff tract eventually being owned by George Street (1777-1831), then Street's wife's second husband Anson Kimberly (died 1836), a local banker and major Georgia landowner, and then the Street heirs, hence its name.

The Raccoon Bluff Tract is the one part of the island never owned by Thomas Spalding or any member of his family. According to David C. Barrow, Jr., c. 1882, whose sister was married to Spalding's grandson, the family's position was: "[Raccoon Bluff was] pine barren which they did not think worth buying." It is not known whether the Street heirs ever farmed this parcel or rented it out. Nor is it known whether or not they ever built a house there, since none survived into modern times. In 1871, the Street heirs, by then scattered over the Southeast, sold the 1000 acre tract to William Hillery and Company, making it the first black-owned land on the island. William Hillery, himself a freed-slave, had formed a company with two other freedmen with whom he bought the land jointly. (Humphries, p. 63; Deeds)

William Hillery and Company divided the 1,000 acres in several ways including into 20 lots of some 33 acres each. The lots were all long,

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leading to the water. The settlement that was created there, also known as Raccoon Bluff, was for nearly a century the largest black settlement on Sapelo, only to be dissolved by land rearrangement and swaps by R. J. Reynolds, Jr., in the 1950s, culminating in its total dissolution by 1968. At its height, Raccoon Bluff contained many one-story residences, a church, general stores, and a school.

While schools for the African-American children on Sapelo were conducted immediately after the Civil War by the American Missionary Association and others, it is not known where these were located. (Duncan) A school is mentioned as being on the island in 1875, and could have been at Raccoon Bluff. In 1878, there were 108 school-age children on the island. In 1927 a Rosenwald School building was built at Raccoon Bluff that was later dismantled, with only the chimney remaining.

After the 1898 hurricane, the congregation of the First African Baptist Church (from Hanging Bull on the west side of the island) was moved there and built a new church building. The only structure remaining of this once viable settlement is this church, the First African Baptist Church, built c.1900. Its congregation, as well as many descendants of its early members, were all moved to the Hog Hammock settlement by 1968. There was also an organization called the Sons and Daughters of the Union at Raccoon Bluff.

The Kenan Place (1794-1912)

The Kenan Tract, a 1500 acre tract located near the middle of the island, ran across the island from west to east, began as the northern most part of the South End tract which was purchased from the French estates by Thomas Spalding/Richard Leake in 1802. It was part of Spalding's South End plantation from that time until 1835 when it was given by Spalding to his daughter, Catherine (1810-1881), when she married Michael J. Kenan (1807-1875) of Milledgeville, Georgia. With this land, he also gave her 86 slaves, as reflected in the deed. Many of these slaves are the direct ancestors of many of the residents of Hog Hammock today. There are no above ground structures remaining on this tract today, although there was for a long time a homeplace there, called "Duplin"--which caused them to rename the adjacent river the Duplin River after the Kenan homeplace in North Carolina---and, it is assumed, other associated farm buildings. In the 1860 Census there were 118 slaves living there in 27 slave houses on the cotton plantation. (Juengst, p. 89ff)

During the Civil War the Kenans retreated to Milledgeville, Georgia, with their slaves. (McFeely) After the Civil War, the Kenan family returned to lived there at first seasonally, and eventually full-time,

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taking an active part in local affairs. The family never sold any land to any of the freedmen and made no divisions of their land. By 1906, the property was leased for timbering including turpentine, raising cattle, and for an oyster canning factory. (**Darien Gazette**) The Kenans left many descendants, many of whom live in the Darien, Georgia, area today.

While the Kenan family never actually sold any land to African-Americans on the island, one major settlement existed within their property. This was Hanging Bull. It is known to have existed as a viable settlement shortly after the Civil War, and no doubt dated from a slave community. The First African Baptist Church was organized there in 1866, flourished into the 1890s, and after the 1898 hurricane was moved to Raccoon Bluff c.1898-1900. The church at Hanging Bull was the oldest one on the island, and the only one until St. Luke's at Hog Hammock was started in 1884 to 1885. This community apparently disappeared after the devastation of the 1898 hurricane and the removal of its church congregation to Raccoon Bluff.

The Kenan family owned and lived on this tract until 1912, when it too was sold to Howard Coffin.(More Later.)

Placenames associated with this part of the island are: Kenan Field, the name for the archaeological site there; and Hanging Bull, first found in the French era c.1793, and later the name of an African-American community that flourished there c.1866-1898.

The South End (1794-1912)

The South End of Sapelo is considered historically to be all that land south of the North End/Raccoon Bluff tracts, and after 1835, everything south of the Kenan Tract, which went all the way across the island. The South End was always operated in the antebellum period as one plantation.

The South End Plantation was purchased by Richard Leake (1747-1802), who had previously owned Jekyll Island, in 1801 from the French company's heirs and in 1802, at Leake's death, became owned by Thomas Spalding, Leake's son-in-law, the husband of his only child, Sarah. The estate then was considered to be 5,000 acres, or roughly about half the island. Later surveys increased the number of actual acres, leaving 5,000 acres as the "official" number of acres as late as 1900 for the South End.

Thomas Spalding (1774-1851), a Georgia native, became a noted person on the coast of Georgia. The chapters of his biography easily summarize his remarkable career: legislator and congressman, Sapelo

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owner, agricultural experimenter, construction material experimenter, sugar producer, philosopher, banker, Darien figure, arbitrator (for the State of Georgia), promoter (of tabby), statesman, and family man. He wrote often in agricultural journals to promote advances in agriculture. He introduced tabby back to the coast of Georgia. The tabby ruins on Sapelo appear to date from after his personal promotion for tabby's reintroduction. He was a Renaissance man in the Jeffersonian tradition. (Coulter; Coleman, II, 912-913)

Thomas Spalding, in his prime, had owned nearly 500 slaves on Sapelo and elsewhere, including his mainland plantations and his mainland home, Ashantilly, near Darien, adjacent to the cemetery where he and many of his descendants were buried. In the 1820 census, he had 350 slaves, and in 1830, 406 at all locations.

Spalding considered the South End his major Sapelo Plantation, having given the two others he owned to two of his children: The Kenan Tract and the Chocolate or North End Tract, both previously mentioned. At each of his other children's marriages, he also gave them a plantation and slaves to work on the property. (Will of Thomas Spalding)

Thomas Spalding ran a cotton plantation, but also, after 1805, raised sugar cane, necessitating the Sugar Mill which is one of the few visible remains from his ownership. (Juengst, p. 9ff) It is located adjacent to Long Tabby on the west side of the island.

When Thomas Spalding died in 1851, he willed the South End tract to his grandson, and namesake Thomas Spalding, II, then only 4 years old. "The rest of my property on Sapelo Island, to wit the land I live on and the negroes now two hundred and odd [250] to be transferred and turned over to my executors in trust for the following purposes, to wit, for the education and future benefit and use of my grand son Thomas Spalding.... "

The antebellum plantation house, called the South End House, was built c.1810-1812 (Sullivan, 1992, p. 99 from **Letters of Robert Mackay**) at the south end in the approximate location of the current Coffin-Reynolds Mansion. Documents show it to have been in ruins by the early 1860s. One of the great features of the house site was the grove of live oaks that still surrounds the house site creating an incredible canopy of trees. While no formal study has been made, presumably associated auxiliary structures existed in proximity to the antebellum house site. The site remained a ruin until 1910. (See below)

In 1860, on the eve of the Civil War, the census indicated that the Spalding family, at South End and on the North End, had a total of 252 slaves living in 50 slave houses. Combined with the Kenan slaves of

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118, for a total of 370 enslaved people, that is a rough estimate of the African-American population of the island on the eve of Freedom.

Randolph Spalding and his siblings together held the largest number of slaves in the county in the 1860 census, over 650 people. This combined family ownership probably made the Spalding family one of the largest slave-holding families in the state. Spalding's 200 bales of cotton produced was the largest number produced on any plantation in the county, and his total acreage was the largest number of improved acres in the county.

During the Civil War, there were some Confederate encampments on the Island, most notably in the fall of 1861, when Confederate troops built a battery near the lighthouse. General Robert E. Lee ordered all the Georgia coastal islands abandoned in February, 1862, and reports show that the island was deserted that Spring. There was a military skirmish on the island in November, 1862. But, generally, during the war, the island was mostly deserted by the planters, their families and their slaves.

After the end of the Civil War in 1865, many of the former slaves returned to the island. Many of them expected land as promised by General W. T. Sherman in his famous Field Order No. 15, of January 16, 1865, which promised such. (Duncan, p. 19) When this was rescinded by President Andrew Johnson later that year, the freedmen lost their legal claims to land under that field order. The actual applications for land can be found in the records of the Freedmen's Bureau. (McFeely)

The immediate post-Civil War times were turbulent ones for Georgians and no less for owners and residents of Sapelo, not only the white owners but also the newly-freed men and women. When Federal Soldiers came to Sapelo in August, 1865 they identified the following black settlements there and the distribution of the 352 freedmen who had resettled on the island:

[South End, owner Thomas Spalding, II]
2 dwellings, 22 miserable cabins
130 freedmen self-sustaining

[Kenan Tract, owner Michael Kenan]
100 freedmen, mostly self-sustaining

[North End, owner Randolph Spalding Estate]
122 freemen, about 60 need help

(Freedmen's Bureau quoted in Sullivan, 1992, p. 815; Duncan, p.

26)

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Earlier, during the middle of the war, a Federal soldier had visited the island and spoke of the following black settlements:

South End: settlements named South End, Behaviour, and Bush Camp.

Kenan or Middle: settlements named Hanging Bull and Kenan

North End: settlements named Chocolate.

Thus if we interpret one each of these to be the slave quarters of the plantation owners themselves, the records would seem to indicate several settlements located apart from the main antebellum plantation quarters. (Freedmen's Bureau Records)

After the Civil War, Charles Harris Spalding, the uncle of Thomas Spalding, II, negotiated with the U. S. government for the return of his nephew's plantation. After several years, the order for the restoration of the plantation, the South End, to Thomas Spalding, II, came on December 6, 1867, shortly before the younger Spalding turned 21, and could inherit it.

Shortly thereafter, the Spalding family returned to Sapelo Island in 1868 when Thomas Spalding, II (1847-1885) turned 21 and inherited the South End, his legacy from his grandfather. While he was the sole owner of the South End, eventually he, his wife, his brother and sister, their spouses and their widowed mother came to live on the west side of the South End in what they called the "Barn Creek Colony". Today, this is in the area of the Long Tabby Building, used as an office by the Department of Natural Resources, and the adjacent Sugar Mill Ruins, vestiges of Thomas Spalding, Senior's, plantation.

In 1878, Thomas Spalding, II, who, coming on hard financial times began selling plots of land to his brother and sister, a few non-relatives, and also to members of the black community. The first recorded sale of land in what is now Hog Hammock was dated May 10 and on September 19, for land in Shell Hammock. It is most likely that the people who eventually lived in Hog Hammock were living there well before they were able to purchase land. (More Later on Hog Hammock) The settlement of Hog Hammock, which is still viable today, eventually included the St. Luke Baptist Church, the lodge where several different groups met--such as the Masons, Eastern Star, and the Alliance, a school, and several general stores, as well as many residences. The layout of Hog Hammock, although of irregular, non-grid pattern, is seen on an 1891 plat to be the same configuration as it is today.

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The South End Tract also included another black settlement, Shell Hammock, on the south end of the island slightly west, southwest of the current Marine Institute. Land sales to it were also begun by 1878. This settlement, which included residences and a praise house, was totally extinguished by 1960 by land swaps under R. J. Reynolds.

The South End had included some of the slave residential areas for Thomas Spalding's plantation. These areas are not identified by any surviving, above-ground resources except Behavior Cemetery. Behavior Cemetery, located just east of the Long Tabby/Barn Creek Colony area, has been a black burial ground for over a century. It is today the only burial ground for the black community at Hog Hammock, although it is located some distance from the settlement. An earlier cemetery, known as Orleans, existed prior to the hurricane of 1898 and was presumably totally destroyed at that time or no longer usable afterwards.

The South End also includes the docking area, called Marsh Landing, which has been the major landing site for most of the 20th century. In earlier eras, especially the last quarter of the 19th century, boats, even steamers, would land at High Point at the North End to pick up or leave passengers. Island residents have always had private docks at each of the major house sites, at Raccoon Bluff, etc.

Most of the houses on the west side of the island dating from the "Barn Creek Colony" era of the Spalding family's return to the island have not survived. They called one "Riverside" and one was at Marsh Landing. Today there are a number of 20th century dwellings in that vicinity dating from the Coffin-Reynolds-Department of Natural Resources ownership era.

In the late 1860s, the returning Spalding family was not able to maintain the antebellum lifestyle of Thomas Spalding, Senior. They were met by financial problems and, eventually, the untimely deaths of the two Spalding grandsons. T. Bourke Spalding (1849-1884), the younger brother of Thomas, II, died first. He owned Marsh Landing. Then Thomas Spalding, II (1847-1885) died a few months later, ending their hopes of bringing the island back to prosperity. Thomas Spalding, II, and his wife had recently built a new house on the South End, near the antebellum mansion ruins, but on a different site. That house has not survived.

The majority of the South End tract, still close to 5,000 acres, that had not been sold to the residents of Hog Hammock, or to Spalding relatives, was proposed for sale in various plans, which the heirs thought would be solutions to their financial woes. Those that made the newspaper were: State Penitentiary or Penal Farm (1876, 1897, and

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1908); resort hotel (1884, again after Jekyll Island was sold in 1886, and again in 1893 and 1898); and for a Methodist retreat similar to Ocean Grove, N. J. (1905).

None of these ever materialized on Sapelo.

Thomas Spalding, II, 's widow, nee Sarah Barrow McKinley, who in 1889 had married his first cousin, William C. Wylly, died May 28, 1897. Within a few years, her widower, unsuccessful in having the South End become the state penitentiary, was forced into a mortgage foreclosure, losing it in a sale in 1900. Wylly left Sapelo Island for good after losing the South End.

Eventually the South End came under the ownership of a group of investors who succeeded the mortgage company. Around 1910, these men, headed by T. H. Boone of Macon, Georgia, formed the Sapelo Island Company. The company began rebuilding the main house at South End in 1911 into a two-story house with dormer windows for use as a hunting lodge. The house was almost ready for occupancy when Howard E. Coffin (1873-1937) of Detroit, discovered Sapelo. Coffin, an automobile manufacturer, came to Savannah in November, 1911 for that city's famous auto races. Having been fascinated by Georgia's coast on a prior visit, his hosts showed him more and that included Sapelo. Within a short while, negotiations were underway to buy the South End tract, with the just-completed house, as well as the rest of the island. The **Darien Gazette** of June 15, 1912, as had the Savannah paper of June 13, announced "Sapelo Island Sold". All the deeds for the major portions of the island were finalized that week. (Sullivan, 1992, pp. 599-605; Martin, pp. 6-8.) (See below, The Coffin Era)

The Lighthouse Tract (1808-1933)

Another parcel cut out of the South End by Thomas Spalding, senior, was the Lighthouse tract. This was originally a five-acre tract sold to the Federal government by Thomas Spalding in 1816, the state of Georgia having ceded jurisdiction to the Federal government in 1808. The lighthouse built there in 1820 still survives. During the Civil War, the lighthouse island was the site of a Confederate battery (**Darien Gazette 1898**). In 1875, Thomas Spalding, II, deeded more land to the Cromley family, the lighthouse keepers, who in turn sold 182 acres of the Lighthouse Island, as it was then, to the U. S. government in 1904. During the Spanish American War in 1898, the lighthouse island was being fortified when the war ended. (**Darien Gazette 1898**) In its heyday, the original Sapelo light was painted with stripes as were other lighthouses. After the hurricane of October

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2, 1898 severely injured the building, it was deactivated and a new metal structure built, opening in 1905. It was used until 1933. At that time it was dismantled. Its base footings can still be found in the underbrush. There is an 1877 metal beacon on the lighthouse tract and ruins of other associated buildings. Several members of the Cromley family served as lighthouse keepers from the 1870s until deactivation in 1933. In 1950, the U. S. sold the lighthouse tract to R. J. Reynolds, Jr., a total of 195 acres. He in turn created the causeway connecting the island to the main beach road. In 1992, the State of Georgia got full title to the lighthouse from Reynolds' heirs.

The Coffin Era 1912-1934

Howard E. Coffin (1873-1937) came to Georgia and specifically to Savannah to see the auto races and was enticed to see some of the other sights, eventually coming to Sapelo. He closed a deal with Boone and the Sapelo Island Company, purchasing the South End tract. The Darien and Savannah newspapers announced on or about June 15, 1912: "Sapelo Island Sold". Of course, this was for the white-owned parcels, as discussed above, the North End from the Sawyers, the South End from Mr. Boone and company, the Kenan Tract from the Kenan family, and smaller tracts in the Barn Creek Colony area on the island's west side. He also leased Blackbeard Island shortly after his Sapelo purchases.

Howard E. Coffin was, from 1910 to 1930, vice president of the Hudson Motor Car Company of Detroit, and was a major contributor to the development of the automobile industry. He was also a major Republican, with many friends in high places. He had been president of the Society of Automotive Engineers, author of the **Engineering Handbook**, and was on many national boards during World War One aimed at industrial preparedness. He also was a promoter and believer in the future of commercial aviation and became president of the forerunner of United Air Lines in 1925.

On Sapelo, Coffin brought back cattle raising as a major activity, building a new frame barn complex at the present site of the Marine Institute. These buildings were replaced in the 1930s by the current buildings. Coffin brought many industries to the island, thus giving several hundred island residents jobs and a livelihood. Eventually by the 1920s he began to rebuild the South End House or Big House into a place of splendor, more in keeping with the need to entertain his important friends. The house, designed in part by Albert Kahn of Detroit, was finished by 1928. Coffin used the house as his winter home. Notable nationally-known visitors included President and Mrs. Calvin Coolidge in December, 1928, Charles Lindbergh in February,

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1929, and President Herbert Hoover in December, 1932. The guest book survives as a testament to the many famous people he brought to his island. (Sullivan)

On Sapelo many buildings remain that attest to the extent of the Coffin era. Besides the Big House (Coffin-Reynolds Mansion) there are numerous additional residences nearby that survive. They were built or ordered via Sears-Roebuck in the mid-1920s to house various workers. There is the greenhouse complex with its attached gardener's residence. There is a tennis court and several multiple-family dwellings near the Marine Institute that date from his era. The Long Tabby building was renovated in his time as a temporary residence and later used as an office. There is also a Sears house erected at Chocolate for overnight visits. Coffin also left a legacy with his own photographic history of his era and his accomplishments in irrigation on the island.

Coffin did not contain his Georgia interests just to Sapelo, for in 1928 he opened the Cloister on Sea Island adjacent to St Simons Island, the island just south of Sapelo. This resort quickly became, and remains, Georgia's only five-star hotel. He became part-owner of nearby St. Catherine's Island about this time, all of this while keeping his permanent residence in Detroit. He also had a yacht, the Zapala.

Coffin also left the legacy of historical research, for under his aegis, local historians, notably Charles Spalding Wylly (1836-1923), a grandson of Thomas Spalding, wrote his recollections in "The Story of Sapelo", unpublished, and other writings. Coffin purchased documents and other items of the legacy of the island, all of which helped future generations document the history. (Cate Collection: contains Wylly Mss. and Ella Barrow Spalding memoirs.)

Coffin was, as were many others of that era, beset by financial worries from the Depression which started in 1929. His wife died in 1932 and by then his interests had shifted to the Cloister and other investments. He thus decided to sell Sapelo.

Coffin sold the island after exactly twenty-two years of ownership, the last date in his guest register being June 12, 1934. He sold all the island that he owned. The sale excluded the seven areas he did not own: the five black settlements (Belle Marsh, Hog Hammock, Lumber Landing, Raccoon Bluff and Shell Hammock), Behavior Cemetery, or the Lighthouse. (Sullivan, 1992, p. 658.) Coffin died in 1937. He and his wife were buried at Christ Church Cemetery at Frederica, on St. Simons Island.

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The R. J. Reynolds Era (1934-1964)

Coffin found a buyer in R. J. Reynolds, Jr. (1906-1964), the 28-year old heir to the cigarette fortune from Winston-Salem, N.C. Reynolds, born into wealth, lead a lavish lifestyle. His tenure as owner of Sapelo, along with other properties in North Carolina and elsewhere, is remembered as one of much activity on the island. He enjoyed entertaining in the Big House, but was also concerned with making the house more secure because he had young children who visited. In 1936, he hired Atlanta architect Philip Shutze to remodel parts of the house giving it its current configuration. (Plans in DNR files, originals at Georgia Tech.) Atlanta-based, Greek-born artist Athos Menaboni added interesting paintings to the Big House, most notably the circus room ceiling and walls. Reynolds had the barn complex torn down and rebuilt in the 1930s into a new barn complex of more permanent buildings that remain today. The new barn complex was designed by Augustus Constantine. (Plans, DNR Files, originals at S.C.Historical Society.) In 1953-1954, this complex became the Marine Institute of the University of Georgia, as it remains today. The institute, started under R. J. Reynolds, Jr.,'s sponsorship and with his foundation's support, is internationally-known for its research efforts. Reynolds also had the elaborate pond designed near the main house, to represent the continents. He also had roads rearranged on the northeast side of the island to create a duck pond there for hunting. (Heeb)

Reynolds and his attorneys also began the process of moving the African-American residents on the island into one community, Hog Hammock. This effort is said to have started in order to create a hunting preserve on the North End, which included the Raccoon Bluff settlement, as well as other smaller communities: Belle Marsh, Lumber Landing, and some scattered houses. On the South End, while Hog Hammock had existed since the 1870s, other settlements included Shell Hammock. All of these were eventually bought out, and the owners' land swapped for land within Hog Hammock. All but Raccoon Bluff had been bought out when Reynolds died in December, 1964 in Switzerland where he lived with his fourth wife, Dr. Annemarie Schmidt Reynolds. The Raccoon Bluff settlement was extinguished shortly thereafter, leaving Hog Hammock the only African-American community on Sapelo.

The future of Sapelo's preservation would probably have been lost had Reynolds died while married to earlier wives, since they had no apparent scientific interest. Although Dr. Schmidt had been married to Reynolds only a short while, she continued to carry on his legacy in many ways, especially by remaining active with the Sapelo Island Foundation. In 1969, she arranged for the State of Georgia, through the Department of Natural Resources, to purchase the North End of Sapelo, approximately 2/3 of the island, creating the R. J. Reynolds

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Wildlife Refuge (now the R. J. Reynolds State Wildlife Management Area). The Sapelo Island Research Foundation, founded by Reynolds in 1949 under a different name, by then owned the South End, and they sold this remaining 1/3 of the island to the State of Georgia in December, 1976, again under the Department of Natural Resources management. (The foundation continues today, with Mrs. Annemarie Reynolds as chairman. It has continued to support the Marine Institute, owns some land within Hog Hammock, and supports college education for children in Hog Hammock, among other things.)

The Lighthouse Tract remained jointly-owned by the state and members of the Reynolds family until 1992, when it too came under total state ownership. The 427-acre Hog Hammock community remained as the locally-owned enclave of the island's African-American residents.

In December, 1976, as part of the Federally-funded purchase of the South End of Sapelo, the area was created the nation's second National Estuarine Sanctuary for the preservation of the estuarine environment. President Jimmy Carter, who had been instrumental during his governorship (1971-1975) in seeing the State of Georgia get involved in Sapelo's preservation, along with nearby Ossabaw Island, made a visit to Sapelo in 1979 while president, thus becoming the third president to visit while in office. Sapelo Island opened for public tours in 1977.

First African Baptist Church and the Raccoon Bluff Community

The church at Raccoon Bluff is the last remaining vestige of what was the largest African-American community on Sapelo Island. As mentioned above, the community began in 1871 when the 1,000-acre Street Place was sold to William Hillary and Company, a black-owned consortium. The three founders each took 111 acres, and divided the remaining 666 acres into 20 lots of 33 or so acres each. (McFeely, pp. 141-142) No historic plat has been found to show the unusual configuration of the settlement.

The residents of Raccoon Bluff, freed from slavery less than a decade earlier, were small farmers and fishermen. The community eventually had a school, the last building being the Rosenwald School being built in 1927 and after the dissolution of the community, moved to Hog Hammock to serve as the auxiliary building for St. Luke's Baptist Church, where it is today.

The community did not have a church until after the devastating hurricane of October 2, 1898, which destroyed the First African Baptist Church at Hanging Bull, on the west side of the island, within the Kenan tract. After the storm, the residents of the Hanging

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Bull community, who were not land owners, apparently moved to the island's other settlements. The congregation decided to move the church to Raccoon Bluff, where the present building was built c.1899-1900. Since the hurricane of 1898 had destroyed numerous frame buildings across the water from Raccoon Bluff on Blackbeard Island, the church is said to have been built from lumber washed up to the bluff after the storm. The church is similar to other coastal black churches built about the same time in Darien, and nearby Frederica on St. Simons Island.

The First African Baptist Church dates its founding as a congregation to 1866, and it soon became a member of the Zion Baptist Association, a grouping of coastal Georgia black churches. It was the only church congregation on Sapelo until 1884, when what became St. Luke's Baptist Church was organized at Hog Hammock. The First African Baptist Church, newly-rebuilt at Raccoon Bluff, remained a viable institution there until 1968. The church was the community center for baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Local residents recall hearing the bell in the bell-tower (now gone) on the church as it tolled for the death of a member, especially in the days before telephones kept islanders in touch.

While the church building could survive at this location, the congregation could not when its members were forced to move several miles away. R. J. Reynolds, Jr., who had bought Howard Coffin's interest in Sapelo in 1934, started a policy soon thereafter of consolidating the African-American islanders into one settlement, Hog Hammock. He did this to turn everything north of the South End of the island into a wildlife and hunting preserve, with limited access. By the 1950s, his efforts, through his attorneys, were well underway, and by his death in 1964, most people had left Raccoon Bluff. Allen Green (born 1907), long a member of this church, and now best known as the island's basketmaker, for a long time refused to leave, but eventually did leave. He is considered the last resident of Raccoon Bluff.

The congregation acquired land in Hog Hammock in 1963 and built a new church there, keeping the historic name of First African Baptist Church, completed in 1968.

This original church, while abandoned as an active meeting house, remains important to all the African-American residents and landowners of Sapelo and members of their extended families, since most families had relatives who were members of the congregation. The church symbolizes the lost community of Raccoon Bluff, once the island's largest settlement. In visiting here, they can recall a viable community with houses, stores, a school, and the meeting place for the Sons and Daughters of the Union.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS): (X) N/A

- () preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67)
has been requested
- () previously listed in the National Register
- () previously determined eligible by the National Register
- () designated a National Historic Landmark
- () recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- () recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- (X) State historic preservation office
- (X) Other State Agency Georgia Department of Natural Resources
- () Federal agency
- () Local government
- () University
- () Other, Specify Repository:

Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): MC460

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre.

UTM References

A) Zone 17 Easting 477920 Northing 3481160

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is marked on the enclosed topographic map. The boundary is considered to be 20 feet from all sides of the building since there was no separate plat, designated parcel, or county tax map for the property because it is included within a large tract of land owned by the State of Georgia.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property was established as twenty feet from either side of the church, since there is currently no designated parcel for the church within the larger State of Georgia, Department of Natural Resources-owned land.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr., Historian
organization Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources
street & number 57 Forsyth St., Suite 500
city or town Atlanta **state** Georgia **zip code** 30303
telephone (404) 656-2840 **date** July 17, 1996

(HPS form version 10-29-91)

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 96000916

Date Listed: 9/6/96

First African Baptist Church
at Raccoon Bluff
Property Name

McIntosh
County

GEORGIA
State

N/A

Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Mr. M. M. [Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

9/17/96
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

Section No. 8

This nomination is amended to change the period of significance to c. 1900-1946, because the property's association with the relocation of the community in 1964 is not direct enough to make a case for exceptional importance. Because of the removal of the bell tower, interior balcony, and church furniture, the building is not eligible under Criterion C, and architecture is deleted as an area of significance.

These changes have been discussed with the Georgia SHPO.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Photographs

Name of Property: FIRST AFRICAN BAPTIST CHURCH
AT RACCOON BLUFF
City or Vicinity: SAPELO ISLAND VICINITY
County: MCINTOSH
State: Georgia
Photographer: M. ELIZABETH GIBSON
Negative Filed: Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Date Photographed: May, 1995

Description of Photograph(s):

- 1 of 4: Front facade with entrance (and showing where steeple/bell tower was removed); photographer facing east.
- 2 of 4: Rear facade with two rear doors; photographer facing northwest.
- 3 of 4: Interior, altar area with rear door; photographer facing east.
- 4 of 4: Interior, detail of colored glass window; photographer facing west.