



The Heritage Observer

News from
The Heritage Library

Bringing the Past to Life

Vol. 11, No. 2

April 2019

In Remembrance of Ludwig “Lou” E. Benfante August 19, 1947 – March 9, 2019

Heritage Library member, volunteer and Board President, Lou Benfante was dedicated to the history of Hilton Head Island and through that dedication he became a part of the Island’s history – an irreplaceable chapter in the story of the Island.

Lou was born in Brooklyn, New York, a first-generation American whose parents immigrated from Italy. He was fiercely proud of his Italian heritage and nothing was more important to him than his family – his devoted wife, Laurette Doscher, his children and his grandchildren.

Lou graduated from Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in 1969 with a B.A. in History. He graduated magna cum laude with interdepartmental Honors and membership in Phi Beta Kappa. Lou founded the Lehigh Alumni Club of the Lowcountry and recently received the Distinguished Alumnus Award which is the highest honor bestowed on a Lehigh alumnus.

Lou’s career, over 40 years in supply management, included executive positions with Milliken, Estee Lauder, Cummins and finally Hilton Head Regional Healthcare from which he retired in the end of 2010.

Retired, Lou joined our Heritage Library finally putting his history degree to use.



He threw himself into his volunteer work, studying the history of the Island and the Lowcountry. His research was meticulous, his love of the Island’s history infectious.

As Chairman of the Heritage History Department, Lou created dynamic additions to

the Library’s programs. He directed volunteers who wrote stories about Hilton Head and the Lowcountry and presented them to visitors and Island residents on a weekly basis. He created weekly tours of Ft. Mitchel which he and other volunteers led and an Old Fort Pub dinner tour with a talk by Lou, in costume, as General Mitchel. He worked on the Ft. Mitchel and Zion Cemetery documents required for admission to the National Register of Historic Places, a successful endeavor.

Lou loved turning facts into fun things, according to Barbara Catenaci, Executive Director of Heritage Library, and could keep an audience of elementary students, teenagers, or adults spellbound. He taught courses for the University of South Carolina at Beaufort Cemetery, taught at Osher Lifelong Learning Institute and Lifelong Learning of Hilton Head Island, and presented talks at local organizations and clubs in the Hilton Head community. Also, Lou wrote numerous articles on Hilton Head history for local publications.

It was Lou’s tireless efforts and boundless enthusiasm that helped to make the Heritage Library a critical part of Hilton Head’s cultural fabric. He loved the history of this Island and, although he is gone, he will always be part of it.

We shall deeply miss him.

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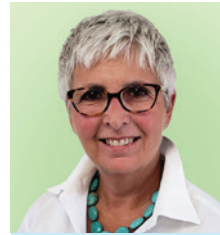
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From the Board

At this year's Annual Meeting four directors were elected to office: Ezra Callahan, Barry Riordan and Rich Thomas are returning for another term of office and James MacLeod will serve his first term.

James MacLeod is currently the Non-Executive Chairman of CoastalSouth, Inc., having previously served as the Chief Executive Officer of CoastalSouth and as the President and Chief Operating Officer of CoastalStates Bank. Currently he serves on the Board of Directors of CoastalSouth, Inc., CoastalStates Bank, and CoastalStates Mortgage, Inc. Before joining CoastalSouth, Jim worked for Mortgage Guaranty Insurance Corporation for 22 years, where he served as Executive Vice President in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.



By Barbara Catenaci
Executive Director

Locally, Jim is the Vice Chairman of the Board of the Arts Center of Coastal Carolina and involved in both the Mitchelville Project and the Heritage Library Advancement Committee. He is also a member of the William Hilton Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution. Previously, Jim was a member of the Board of Trustees of Hilton Head Prep and served as Chairman of that Board.

Jim holds a Bachelor of Science in Economics from the University of Tampa, a Masters in City Planning from Georgia Institute of Technology and a Masters of Science in Real Estate and Urban Affairs from Georgia State University.

Our Library welcomes Jim to the Board of Directors and looks forward to working with him.

Library Receives \$5,000

This winter the Community Foundation of the Lowcountry funded a public art exhibit. The exhibit presented pieces at Coastal Discovery Museum and the Hilton Head Airport. As part of the promotion for this event, the Foundation created a special contest that encouraged members of the community to take and submit a "selfie" with a favorite piece of art. At the end of the exhibit, one person who submitted a picture was chosen and the non-profit of the winner's choice received a \$5,000 prize. The Library encouraged our members and volunteers to not only participate in this contest but to get out and about and enjoy the wonderful art exhibit. That encouragement paid off.

This year's winner is Laurette Doscher-Benfante and her charity of choice is The Heritage Library Foundation. Our heartfelt thanks to the Community Foundation of the Lowcountry and Laurette.

Laurette chose to pose in front of basics#26 by Matthias Neumann. Educated as an architect in Germany, Matthias Neumann's work fluctuates

between a wide range of media, with a particular focus on public art and installations in the public sphere. This work is part of a series of public interventions under the title Basics, which are all site-specific and unique.

To see this piece of art go to: <https://cf-lowcountry.org/About/CommunityLeadership/PublicArt/Exhibition/2018Artists/MatthiasNeumann.aspx>



Ezra Callahan, Vice President, Heritage Board, Laurette Doscher-Benfante, Heritage Membership Chair and Michael Marks, Chairman, Public Art Advisory Committee and member, Board of Directors, Community Foundation of the Lowcountry.

Annual Membership Meeting... A Look Back and a Look Ahead

At 11 on Thursday morning, February 28, Ezra Callahan, Board Vice President, opened the annual Heritage Library Foundation Membership Meeting, welcoming members and saying, "The Annual Meeting is always a time to look back and look ahead and this year's meeting is no different. Here is a quick review of our accomplishments and initiatives in the past year."



*Ezra Callahan,
Board Vice President*

- Completed 90% of the restoration of the Baynard Mausoleum
- Presented the Revolutionary War in the Lowcountry forum, a full-day event with prestigious speakers
- Debuted Colonial Christmas and continued Ghosts & Myths programs at Zion Cemetery
- Sponsored another successful History Day – a fun day for visitors and residents
- Continued our Ancestry Classes, History Programs and Tours; 1102 people attended, a 10% increase in 2018
- Held a Spanish Genealogy Workshop with Lourdes del Pino, VP of the Cuban Genealogical Society as instructor
- Participated in the Crescendo Celebration featuring more than 100 unique arts and cultural programs
- Culminated an incredible amount of work that resulted in Zion Cemetery being named to the National Register of Historic Places
- Increased membership by 36%
- Logged more than 22,000 volunteer hours – worked by our priceless volunteers



Bill Alstaetter presenting the H&H Hero award to Laurette Doscher-Benfante on behalf of her husband, Lou Benfante

Looking ahead, we have started Phase II of the Chapel of Ease History Park and will be working with our Advancement Committee to develop funding and with the Town of Hilton Head Island and the Hilton Head Area Home Builders Association to develop plans for the park. We are looking forward to bringing our various data bases into one software program and upgrading aging technology that supports research, presentations and building data bases. We will continue to work with our members, volunteers and community partners to provide

more programs offering local and family history in fun, educational and exciting ways.

Peter Cooper, Treasurer, reported that the Library is working in a fiscally prudent manner and has begun this year well within our means.

Ezra Callahan, James MacLeod Barrett Riordan and Richard Thomas were presented for election to the Board of Directors and were voted to the Board, Class of 2022.

This year the Library created the Heritage & History Hero award to be given to someone in the organization who always goes above and beyond and provides distinguished service to our mission. The award will be presented at our annual meetings and this year was presented by Gwen and Bill Alstaetter. Announcing the H&H Hero award, Bill said, "We think that you will all agree that today's recipient is the perfect choice for the reward – Lou Benfante." Bill continued with a history of Lou's accomplishments which are given in his obituary on Page 1.

Ivan Bennett, General Vice President, Region 3, Society of the Sons of the Revolution, presented Lou Benfante and Rich Thomas with the SAR Medal of Appreciation for their work, through the Library, with the Sons of the Revolution. A distinguished award.



Laurette Doscher-Benfante, on behalf of her husband, Lou, and Rich Thomas with their SAR Medals of Appreciation

Following lunch, our guest speaker was Jennifer McEwen, Director of Cultural Affairs, Town of Hilton Head Island. Jenn is charged with creating and implementing a civic plan for enhancing the Island's existing entertainment, arts, culture and heritage

assets and for identifying new assets for development. She distributed a pamphlet which includes a Culture Map of HHI showing the location of the various organizations. Jenn discussed how the Town is working to focus attention on the importance of history, culture and the arts. She gave us a sneak preview of the report prepared for the Town showing the economic impact of cultural tourism – something in which the Library plays a vital role.

The meeting closed with a special presentation by Michelle Davis, a member of the MLK Celebration Planning Committee of Hilton Head Island. The committee provides inspirational and educational events that we can all enjoy. Each year they recognize a person or organization that exemplifies the message of Dr. King and his hope for the community. Michelle presented a plaque to the Library for "Significant inroads in local ancestral studies and for creating a historical context to our Island and the surrounding area." The Library thanked Michelle for honoring us with this award.

In conclusion, Ezra thanked members for the support they provide year after year and encouraged them to continue their support and to help us grow into the future. He then adjourned the meeting.



Michelle Davis presenting the plaque from the MLK Celebration Planning Committee



It's Birdies Time

The 2019 RBC Heritage Presented by Boeing takes place April 15-21 at Harbour Town Golf Links.

Do you know that our Library will receive 100% of the money we raise in your name through your Birdies for Charity donation plus an additional 15% gift from the Heritage Classic Foundation?

You can make a pledge for every birdie made during the tournament or make a flat donation of \$25 or more. Simply go online to HeritageClassicFoundation.com designating your donation to the Heritage Library Foundation. If you prefer, pledge forms are available at the Library.

Thank you for participating in Birdies for Charity – a wonderful way to help the Library.



Librarian's Corner

It has been a whirlwind of activity at the Library this winter with, thankfully, no snow this year. In addition to our regular genealogy classes held at the Library, we added Osher Lifelong Learning Institute classes to our mix with great success. We offered a series of eight classes on "Finding Your Ancestors..." that were held at the new USCB-HHI campus. Our twenty-five participants attended our twice weekly classes covering a series of topics. Our instructors were: Jan Alpert, Rick Bart, Sunni Bond, Amanda Hughes, Bailey Keeling, Joyce Kelleher, Joe Player, and myself. Barbara Friis assisted with the planning and curriculum but was unable to teach this time. We plan to offer additional OLLI classes in the fall. We also offered our regular Wednesday classes in HHI and Beaufort including the above instructors as well as: Shelly Block, Carol Clemens, and Barbara Friis. A big thank you to all the instructors and to Paula Woods and Holly Moeri for helping to organize the Wednesday classes and making sure the classes ran smoothly. If you have any suggestions for future classes, please share them with me.

New this past term was the addition of Help Sessions for Family Tree Maker given by Carol Clemens. These sessions are for individuals who have taken at least one of Carol's classes and now want one-on-one help with their own program. Jan Alpert continues to offer Help Sessions



Susan Dobbs
Head Librarian

for her DNA students. Call the receptionist desk to schedule an appointment if you wish to attend one of these specialized assistance sessions.

The Library was excited to participate in the Gullah Festival this year. We set up an exhibit and sold books at

Honey Horn during the Gullah Market. Thanks to Carolyn Anderson, Anita Bagley, Rick Bart, Nancy Burke, Ezra Callahan and Kirk Clarke who helped to man the booth. Copies of "They Served..." were given as door prizes to two lucky participants. On Monday, February 18, a continuation of the Gullah Festival, the Library hosted a free research day for locals and visitors interested in tracing their family roots. We assisted over thirty-two individuals that day as they discovered new and exciting facts about their families. Thanks to our genealogist volunteers: Anita Bagley, Rick Bart, Bob Blot, Sunni Bond, Nancy Burke, Richard Chalk and Kirk Clarke. It was an enjoyable and productive day.

The Library still needs a few more volunteers, especially to work as a regular Receptionist at the front desk. Please contact me if you are interested. librarian@heritagelib.org

We plan on having at least two Lunch & Learn sessions with genealogy topics this summer. We'll let you know when details are finalized.

Memorials

It was Lou's wish that donations in his memory be made to the Heritage Library Foundation, PO Box 5950, Hilton Head Island, SC 29938. Donors as of this date are:

Thomas and Susan Barnwell
Peter and Pam Cooper
Jennifer Dwyer
Harry and Dodi Eschenbach
Paul Glick
Elizabeth Hanson
Saralyn and Heath Hatchell

James and Carol Hergen
Rosemarie Izzo & Family
Robert Kirchberger
Susan and Michael Mandell
Michael Monahan
Dee, Brad & Jenny Phillips
Ann Wood

Gullah History Day = Success



By Sunni Bond
Monday and
Wednesday
Librarian

The Heritage Library was an active participant in the Gullah Heritage Celebration, offering genealogical research assistance to locals and visitors. On Monday, February 18th, we offered “Celebrate Your Roots”, a free day of family research and had a great response from local families and visitors. Our main focus was to open up the Library’s resources to local Gullah families but all families were welcome to come in and explore, aided by a

team of volunteers and all the resources available at the Heritage Library.

Generally speaking, unless their ancestors were free men, Blacks of African descent cannot trace their lineage back beyond the 1870 census, the first census in which all residents, regardless of race, were listed. Up until that time, only free Blacks could be found easily in the census records. Enslaved individuals were simply not counted. Some Slave Schedules did list these individuals, but by gender and age only.

With the end of the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation came the time when previously enslaved persons took on last names. Sometimes they assumed the names of the plantation owner or the overseer. Sometimes the choice of name was determined by a color that was particularly meaningful to the previously enslaved family – Brown, Black, White, Green. Or there was a historical person about whom the person had learned and wanted to emulate – Washington, Jackson, and other similar historical figures.

I had the privilege of working with a mother and daughter on February 18 to see if we could sort out some of the lineage information they had acquired, basically by word of mouth. They came to the Library with a large family chart which had a lot of empty spaces, and we wanted to fill in as many of those empty spots as possible. Because their family lines were not of a local connection, we could not use the many sources that local Blacks from our area can use. Some of the resources that we can offer families with histories directly tied to our area include: Native Islander family histories collected by the Library, Colored Troops Index, Voter Registration, Militia Enrollment, and area-specific census data. We had to go to the census records, starting with the most recent (1940) and work our way back as is typical in lineage research.

In doing genealogical research, we often find ourselves relying a great deal on memories. You find a census record where your parent’s parents are listed along with their siblings and you remember talk in the family about “Uncle Frank” or “Aunt Celia” or “Cousin Bill”. From there, you start to build a solid foundation of your family.

We all know from history that there were many instances of white plantation owners or overseers fathering children with their enslaved charges. It became evident that these Library patrons had most likely come from such a lineage. As we talked about information based on family discussions they remembered through the years it was discussed that their paternal grandmother recounted that her own grandparents had been a white owner and an enslaved woman. Proving this kind of lineage, however, is virtually impossible without the use of DNA, and this mother and daughter were encouraged to follow up their research with DNA testing and professional help with the interpretation of the testing results.

As we worked through family histories that day, we had to remind patrons that they have to be prepared to find any and all kinds of information about their families. I always tell individuals with whom I am working on lineage research that we have to be willing to accept the good, the bad, and the ugly because we all have it in our families somewhere. I certainly do in my own lineage, but it is my responsibility, as the family genealogical researcher, to record it all, openly, honestly, and without judgment.

Everyone who participated in this fun day of research and celebration of family roots left Heritage Library with stacks of paper documenting what they had not known before – information about dates/places of birth, marriages, and deaths that had previously been unknown to them, even information about the occupations of their ancestors. No one’s enthusiasm waned, nor had their desire for more knowledge. This is what we volunteers at Heritage Library strive to do – encourage, assist, and document. It is what I personally thrive on doing as the motto on my card reads: Dedicated to connecting you to your ancestors.



History Department

The History Department is having a very busy year.

This winter we scheduled nine classes at the Library and an additional seven with the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. These classes ran from January through March and were a highlight for participants and leaders. The classrooms and university environment are conducive to learning and we look forward to continuing to build our partnerships with USCB HH and OLLI. Winter visitors look forward to something special to do when the weather



By Dee Phillips
History Dept. Co-Chair

is not golf, tennis or beach friendly and our classes are a perfect alternative.

Tours at Zion Cemetery, Ft. Mitchel and the Historic Bike Tours started a month early this year. They are a great way to learn about our local history in an interactive setting with docents and costumed characters. You can find a schedule of tours on the Library's website or call the Library to reserve your place on a tour. The Library's History Department conducts special tours and programs for local groups, family

reunions, students – whatever you wish. Hilton Head Island has a rich history and the Heritage Library wants to share these stories with you. Please check our website frequently. We post new learning opportunities regularly and there is bound to be something of interest to you. Remember, we have many ways for you to learn more about where we live, work and play.

We are always looking for volunteers to join our "team." As a volunteer, you help share Hilton Head's stories while continuing your own learning experience. We are looking forward to seeing you real soon.

Lehigh University Visit

by Ezra Callahan



Lou Benfante, an alumnus of Lehigh University, planned to bring members of Lehigh's Africana Studies Program to Hilton Head to experience the Lowcountry, get a sense of our history and possibly their ancestry. Ezra Callahan, Heritage Board Vice President, worked with Lou on the plans for the visit. When Lou was too ill to conduct the visit, Ezra was able to host the group which was led by Dr. Kwame Essien, Associate Professor of History & Africana Studies, and included Professor Valerie Taylor and students, Blanche, Nikita and Jamir.

On Saturday, March 9th, Ezra met the group, at the McLeod Plantation in Charleston. They were able to immerse themselves in the history of the Plantation and stories of the enslaved people and the McLeod family. On the way to dinner, they visited Charleston.

On Sunday morning they attended services at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston. They were given a tour of the church and learned about the church's history.

After lunch they drove to Hilton Head Island where they had dinner at Ezra's home.

After dinner they viewed *Hilton Head Island*

Back in the Day: Through the Eyes of Gullah Elders. Louise Cohen of The Gullah Museum gave a review of the film.

On Monday, the group continued their history visit with a Gullah Heritage Trail Tour which included stops at the Gullah Museum, Mitchellville and Zion Cemetery, visiting Heritage Library in the afternoon. Dinner was a Gullah meal at Ruby Lee's South. Louise Cohen, Thomas Barnwell and Emory Campbell joined the group for dinner, following with a question and answer session.

On Tuesday they visited Penn Center before heading home.

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Sharing the Heritage

By Iva Roberts Welton

My first work with the National Register of Historic Places, researching Rose Hill Plantation Gothic Revival House and Joseph Kirk, wealthy cotton producer, for inclusion in the Register was successful. This photo of me with Kirk's portrait was taken on Registration Day in 1983.

Several years later, walking in Zion Cemetery, I was thrilled to discover a tall monument dedicated to James Kirk and his wife, Mary Baldwin, enclosed by a fence. The fence was rusty and falling down due to years of weather and vandalism.

Zion Cemetery property was owned by the Hilton Head Historical Society whose President was Dr. Robert Peebles from 1961 until 2005 when their assets were acquired by the Heritage Library Foundation. All existing members of the Historical Society were granted life membership in the Foundation. E.W. (Bill) Altstaetter became president and CEO.

In 2013 I began researching Zion Cemetery for inclusion in the National Register – looking for the answers and details in my computer and other



sources, What fascinating stories there are about the families who are buried there. After more than two years, Lou

Benfante kindly offered to help me finish the application. What a great pleasure to have him assist me. Our application was approved late in 2017.

The Heritage Library is indeed grateful for the many kind donations that have helped us begin this special restoration, a most important one for Hilton Head Island and our environs. There is still a strong need for funds to restore the Kirk monument and fencing, the careful cleaning of the burial stones, building a replica of the original chapel, landscaping, and more. Please help.

I am thrilled to share the news that the Heritage Library will celebrate National Register Day this spring when we will receive the plaque for the St. Luke's Parish Zion Chapel of Ease Cemetery and the Baynard Mausoleum. Watch for the date. I look forward to celebrating with you.

Heritage Volunteer: Richard Chalk

Richard Chalk, our volunteer for this issue, first joined Heritage Library as a member. He was looking for a way to be involved in the community and when he learned that Heritage offered volunteers the opportunity to work with people who wished to research their family genealogy, he became a volunteer.

Richard grew up in West Columbia, SC. He received a BA in Political Science from The Citadel and later a Masters of Church Music.

He married Maelda, "Mae", in December 1979. They have four children: Cristina, Richard III, "Trip", Mollie and Clara. They lived in North Carolina prior to moving to South Carolina when Mae was offered a teaching position at Hilton Head Prep.

Richard's career has been a fascinating combination of his two degrees, political science and church music. He was a Music Minister/Choir Director in North Carolina and served two terms in the North Carolina House of Representatives and one term in the Senate. When he moved to South Carolina, he served three terms in the House of Representatives. He currently serves as a part-time Worship Leader and Choir Director at Indigo Pines Chapel and Sea Island Chapel on the Island.

He has been a licensed Realtor, working in commercial real estate for a number of years.



Richard's two interests, genealogy and history, lured him to becoming a Heritage Volunteer but it is his knowledge and expertise in churches which has led him to his current study of churches and religious institutions on Hilton Head. He has written an interesting article on this subject which will appear in a future issue of the Observer.

What is special about volunteering, he says, is seeing the reaction of people finding out something about their family that they didn't know. "From a personal perspective, I have come to appreciate the vast resources that the Library has on the history of Hilton Head and the materials available for genealogical research."