

USCB Hosts a Lecture and Book-Signing For the History of Beaufort County, Volume Two

USCB Media [lmcgee@uscb.edu@mail72.atl11.rsgsv.net] on behalf of USC Media [lmcgee@uscb.edu]

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UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH CAROLINA
BEAUFORT

MEDIA CONTACT:

Lynn McGee, Ph.D.

USCB Vice Chancellor for Advancement and External Affairs

843-208-8240

lmcgee@uscb.edu

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August 17, 2015

BEAUFORT, S.C. – Nearly 200 history enthusiasts turned out Sept. 12 for a lecture and book-signing to commemorate publication of the second in a three-volume series of books exploring the history of Beaufort County, S.C., by two noted historians at the University of South Carolina Beaufort.

Lawrence S. Rowland, Ph.D., distinguished professor emeritus of history at USCB, and his colleague, Stephen R. Wise, Ph.D., director of the Parris Island Museum and cultural resources manager for the Marine Corps Recruit Depot at Parris Island, presented an illustrated lecture depicting life in Beaufort County during the period covered by their book.

Rebellion, Reconstruction, and Redemption, 1861-1893, The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina, Volume 2, has drawn praise from some of America's leading historians. Over

the course of nearly 600 pages, the book recounts the Battle of Port Royal on Nov. 7, 1861, then segues through the era of Reconstruction before culminating in the fusion government of black Republicans and white Democrats formed after the election of 1892.

The defeat in the Battle of Port Royal in 1861 prompted the Confederate military to flee the Sea Islands of South Carolina to avoid being cut off by the approaching U.S. Navy. White landowners followed the military retreat almost immediately, abandoning some 8,000 slaves on their plantations. The U.S. military and the Treasury department hired the slaves as laborers, thus establishing a wage-based capitalistic economy.

When absent Southern landowners failed to pay their property taxes, the U.S. Government foreclosed on the lands and sold them at auction. About a third of the lands ended up in the hands of former slaves.

“You have the economics changing almost immediately,” says Dr. Wise. “You have a land yeomanry of former slaves established. You have a society being set up. You have the start of a political movement based around black Republicans. All these things, society, economics, politics, all of these changes really occurred within a three-year period.”

“The era of Reconstruction began here in Beaufort, on the Sea Islands of South Carolina, because the Union Army occupied it and because political forces and missionaries wished to push a change in society,” Dr. Rowland adds. “And it worked in Beaufort County because the land was owned by freedmen. When the constitution of 1868 was written, the black majority took over the government of the State of South Carolina and the black majority of Beaufort County took over the Government of Beaufort County.”

The historical period covered in the second volume is “THE pivotal period in Beaufort County history,” Dr. Rowland says. “But, I would argue, broader than that, it is THE pivotal period in American history. In other words, the American republic was never the same after the Civil War. It more resembles Reconstruction now than it resembles anything of the old South before the Civil War. This was a national turning point. Beaufort County was the seedbed of Reconstruction and Reconstruction is more the political model and the cultural and social model of America today than anything of the old republic.”

Among those nearly filling the USCB Center for the Arts for the lecture and book-signing were: Beaufort County Council Chairman Paul Sommerville and his mother, Mayor Billy Keyserling, Beaufort City Councilmen Michael McFee and Philip Cromer, and members of the Beaufort College Board of Trustees, and the university faculty and staff.

The first book in the three-volume series, *The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina, Vol. I, 1514-1861*, which Dr. Rowland wrote with Alexander Moore and George C. Rogers Jr., was published in 1996. The third volume is scheduled to be published later this year.

Located in the heart of the Carolina Sea Islands, the University of South Carolina Beaufort (USCB) is a baccalaureate member of the USC system, serving the southeast coast of South Carolina and Georgia. Since 2002, USCB has tripled its academic degree programs, doubled its FTE enrollment, opened its first on-campus housing (now serving more than 600), joined the NAIA Sun Conference, and fielded conference and national award-winning Sand Shark athletes in nine sports. The university's two campuses serve a diverse student body of 1,800 students. The Hilton Head Gateway campus in Bluffton, SC, offers cutting-edge Computational Science and Nursing laboratories, and a broad range of academic degree programs. It is home to Sand Shark athletics. The Historic Beaufort campus, located on Beaufort's downtown waterfront, houses an innovative baccalaureate Studio Art program in close proximity to Beaufort's many art galleries. Students enjoy opportunities on Hilton Head Island, including the USCB Center for Event Management and a Coastal Ecology research partnership with Vagabond Cruise. USCB serves 1,500 Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) members, who participate in more than 1 million course hours annually, placing OLLI at USCB in the top 10 in the country. The University of South Carolina Beaufort offers students an exceptional place to learn and live in an environment focused on growth, preservation and opportunity.

For more information on the University of South Carolina Beaufort, contact Lynn McGee, Ph.D., vice chancellor for Advancement and External Affairs, at 843-208-8240 or lmcgee@uscb.edu.

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