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BRUNSWICK • ST. SIMONS ISLAND • JEKYLL ISLAND • SEA ISLAND

## PROPOSAL PLANS

Check out the dos and don'ts of restaurant proposals, **CELEBRATIONS, 1B**

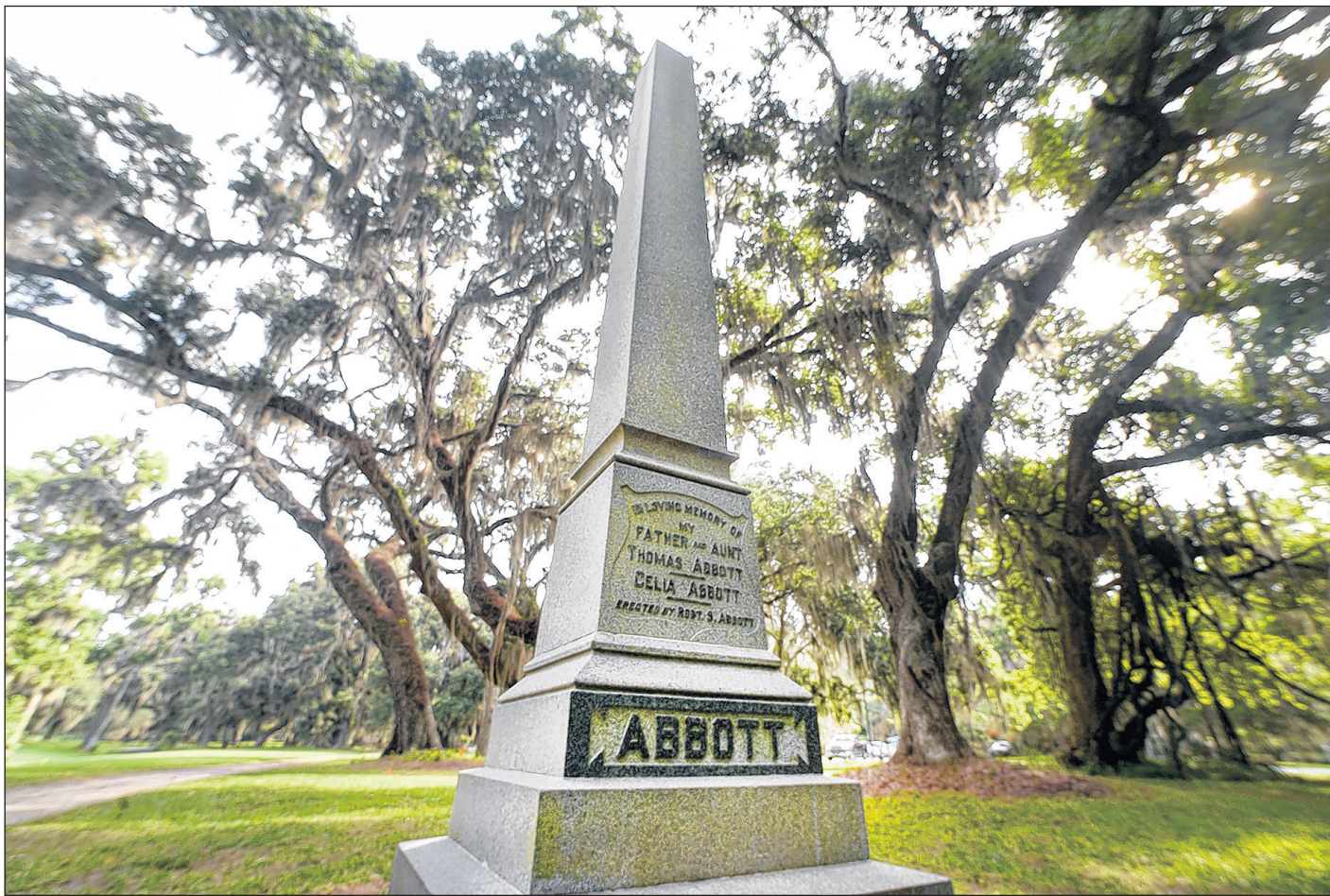
## MOSQUITO BITES

The local health department offers some advice on avoiding the pesky bugs, **LOCAL, 2A**

## GOLF CHAMP

Eli Scott wins the 69th annual Golden Isles Invitational, **SPORTS, 11A**

# FINDING HISTORY



Bobby Haven/The Brunswick News

A monument in memory of Thomas Abbott and Celia Abbott, father and aunt of Robert Abbott, was erected on the Fort Frederica grounds in 1929. A recent non-invasive shallow excavation on the grounds has led to the discovery of a freed slave cemetery, which includes the graves of the two Abbots.

## Memorial planned for African American grave site at Ft. Frederica

By **LARRY HOBBS**

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A stately monument dedicated to the father of a trailblazing 19th century black newspaper publisher rises on the grounds of Fort Frederica National Monument, barely a stone's throw from the former enslaved man's more humble resting place, archaeologists are now convinced.

After several years of searching, Fort Frederica's Michael Seibert said this week he is confident that a recent archaeological excavation on the grounds have located the burial site of Thomas Abbott. He was the father of Robert S. Abbott, who went on to publish the Chicago Defender daily newspaper and become one of America's first

black millionaires.

The wealthy newspaperman returned to St. Simons Island only once, in the 1930s, when he honored his father with the obelisk on or near where he was presumably buried. The granite monument also honors Robert S. Abbott's aunt, Celia Abbott.

But Seibert's research and field work places Thomas and Celia more precisely in a "colored burial lot," rudimentary records of which were uncovered in the archives of nearby Christ Church Frederica. Thomas and Celia were among 10 African Americans listed as being buried at the site, as identified by a hand-drawn map with identifying particulars written in cursive.

Proof of the grave sites came during a dig last month on the location, conducted by a team led by Seibert and Eric Bezemek of

the National Park Service's Southeastern Archaeological Center in Tallahassee, Fla. In at least two locations the team uncovered evenly-spread layers of shell and rock fragments, pieces of colored glass from wine bottles, clear glass shards, ceramic fragments and broken marble.

Such simple adornments were commonly used in burials by members of the Gullah Geechee culture in the 19th century, when the resources for more permanent memorials for loved ones were not available to these freedmen and freedwomen.

"I think we're pretty certain this is it, based on everything we've put together," Seibert said this week. "The location of the different shell piles we encountered pretty

Please see **ABBOTT, 5A**

## Veterans town hall planned

By **GORDON JACKSON**

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David Whitmer, new director of the Carl Vinson VA Medical Center in Dublin, will attend an upcoming VA town hall meeting in Brunswick to introduce himself and to explain plans to improve health care for veterans.

The meeting, scheduled at 6 p.m. on July 19 at the American Legion Post 9, will be the first town hall for area veterans in about three years, said Bennie Williams, post commander and senior vice commander of the 8th American Legion district.

Please see **VETS, 5A**

## Police still searching for woman

By **TERRY DICKSON**

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Three months after a Broward County, Fla., woman's body was found floating in the Darien River, police are still looking for her traveling companion on a charge of concealing a death, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation said.

A fisherman found 29-year-old Sanneka Barriner's body floating near the Boone Seafood dock late on April 3, the Darien Police Department has said.

A GBI investigation showed that Barriner and Shon-May Stone had been traveling north on Interstate

Please see **POLICE, 5A**



## Page One, Part 2

### Abbott

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much correlates exactly with the map we have. We've put a lot of effort into trying to locate these grave sites, and we feel pretty good about it."

The archaeological dig went down only about half a foot to reach the shells and other fragments. Some of the more definitive pieces from the dig were documented and taken to the Southeastern Archaeological Society. The shallow pits have since been filled in, so as not to intrude on the burials.

"We were able to identify this site without disturbing anything," he said.

Seibert is now in the process of establishing a more lasting memorial at the burial site. It is not just for the father of an influential newspaperman, but also for the others buried there, he said. Thomas Abbott is listed on the map as buried in a grave site designated "2" and Celia is listed in the plot marked "4." Others in the map's list include "child of Polly" and a man named Myles, with a barely legible surname that is possibly McMillan.

"We don't have any definitive plans yet, but there will definitely be something," Seibert said of the memorial. "Perhaps a wayside marker that would show the map, kind of explain how we found it and talk about the culture of the people and how they lived."

Seibert first came across the map in 2015, when he was working at the Southeastern Archaeological Center in Tallahassee. A member of Christ Church had uncovered the map in the church archives and shared it with



Bobby Haven/The Brunswick News

Fort Frederica National Monument Integrated Resource Manager Michael Seibert points out the location of the recently-discovered freed slave cemetery on the grounds of Fort Frederica.

him when he was on an archaeological assignment at the fort.

He had already begun trying to find the grave sites by the time he was assigned as Fort Frederica's staff archaeologist a year later. Since then, Seibert has led efforts to pinpoint the burial site in myriad ways, including such technical gizmos as ground penetrating radar, magnetometers, resistivity meters and conductivity meters. He even arranged for a search of the area by dogs specially trained in detecting buried

human remains which, ultimately, turned up nothing, he said.

In the end, the burial site was located using good old fashioned archaeological detective work. A big clue was a bend indicated on the map along one side of the burial lot's property line. On the other side of this line, "Wall of Frederica" is written in cursive. They then matched that bend in the line to the location of a triangular bastion that once jutted out from the walls of Fort Frederica, which was

built beginning in 1736 to protect the new Colony of Georgia from invasion by the Spanish to the south in St. Augustine.

The walls of the fort have long since crumbled, but enough traces of it would have still been above ground to affect the cemetery's property line back in the mid-to late 19th century, archaeologists say.

"The bastion comes out of the fort wall at an angle, shaped like an arrowhead," Bezemek told The News last month, for the June 15

edition of the newspaper's weekly History column. "So the wall turns at an angle, and then the fence line is on the same weird angle."

Fort Frederica ceased operations around the mid 18th century, and many landowners overlapped the property in the decades and centuries that followed, including parts of Christ Church as well as Capt. Stevens' Oatland Plantation. The grounds and some remnants of the fort were established as an official National Park Service site in 1947.

By then, the true resting places of Thomas Abbott and the others interred in the "colored burial lot" had long since been lost to time and attrition. The monument his grateful son established to Thomas Abbott remained standing when the land became part of the national monument site.

Robert S. Abbott was born in 1868 on St. Simons Island and his father died a year later, having known freedom for just a few short years after the Civil War. His mother, Flora, returned to her hometown of Savannah, where she married John Sengstacke, the biracial son of a German sea captain who taught school and published the Woodville Times near Savannah.

Robert S. (Sengstacke) Abbott went on to obtain a law degree in Chicago. Unable to successfully practice law there because of his race, Abbott founded the Chicago Defender in 1904. The Defender became the voice of black America, making its way into the deep South through a network of railroad Pullman porters. The Chicago Defender had grown to a circulation of some 200,000 by the 1920s, with Abbott championing equality and speaking out against racial injustice.

Seibert said preserving and resurrecting pieces of history such as this is what makes his calling worthwhile.

"What ended up working best for us in the end was removing the grass on top and digging a little," he said. "That and the archival research and some basic common sense. That's how we got the confirmation. I feel pretty good about it, that we were successful in doing that."