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Who was the last laird of Sapelo?

Scant evidence on Sapelo Island remain of the Spalding family's 19th-Century legacy on the island.

Grantville, Georgia, July 31,2023

On August 15, 2023, T. M. Brown's *The Last Laird of Sapelo*, a historical novel published by Koehler Books, Virginia Beach, Virginia, releases with a book launch reception and book talks in Darien, Georgia, followed by an extensive book tour.

Following a day-long tour of Sapelo three years ago with a Geechee descendant as our guide, Brown, an author from Grantville, Georgia, began researching the legacy of the Geechee on the island. He soon discovered that Thomas Spalding began acquiring the island in 1803, and over the course of sixty years he and his family cleared and cultivated much of the island using Geechee enslaved workers. However in the first year of the Civil War, Randolph Spalding evacuated his family and virtually all the Geechee workers and their family members to leased land near Milledgeville.

By 1868, after the war ended, Randolph Spalding's widow and family returned to Sapelo. They rebuilt their lives along side four hundred Geechee family members who also had returned to the island. Following the dawn of the 20th-Century, the last Spalding on the island passed away. Subsequent census records revealed the steady decline of the island's Geechee population until today less than forty Geechee descendants still live on Sapelo.

During Brown's research into the history of Sapelo, questions arose which led to writing *The Last Laird of Sapelo*. Why did the relocated Geechee workers return to the remote island at the end of the war? Why return to where they and their parents lived and worked as enslaved workers? Why did the Spalding family return and coexist with the Geechee community on Sapelo after the war? What were the historical facts behind the Spalding and Geechee legacy on Sapelo?

The Last Laird of Sapelo opens with an excerpt from a poem by Abram Ryan, "A land without ruins is a land without memories—a land without memories is a land without history..." Still visible ruins along with Behavior Cemetery remind us of slavery's past on the island—a divisive, tinderbox issue even in 1861 especially in McIntosh County, Georgia, as the story reveals.

T. M. Brown went back to school after a thirty-year sales and marketing career; his lifelong love for history, teaching, and coaching landed him in the classroom. He retired in 2014 and took up writing novels and has published four award-winning Southern novels. He is a member of the Atlanta Writers Club, Southeastern Writers Association, Broadleaf Writers Association, American Christian Fiction Writers, and founding president of Hometown Novel Writers Association, Inc., in Newnan, Georgia.

The Last Laird of Sapelo is based on the tragic story of Randolph Spalding, the youngest son of Georgia's most well-known antebellum-era coastal planter and influential political figure, Thomas Spalding. Following his father's death in 1851, Randolph parlays his father's fame and gifted landholdings on Sapelo Island, hobnobbing from Charleston to Savannah to Milledgeville and ultimately failing to thwart Georgia's decision to follow South Carolina into secession by early 1861.

Within weeks after the assault on Fort Sumter, Lincoln's naval blockade threatens the entire southern coast. Colonel Randolph Spalding, now a reluctant commander of militia, faces a storm of life-altering events in the months that follow, imperiling his family's legacy, livelihood, and lands. He ultimately must decide between supposed justice and saving the life of a slave who exacted revenge for the murder and rape of two children on Sapelo Island.

To request additional information, schedule an interview, or to receive a review copy of *The Last Laird of Sapelo*, or any of T. M. Brown's published works refer to the contact information below:

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