

## Bethesda Comes Alive in Latest Book by Local Authors

BY CHRIS BRANTLEY

As children, Laura Connerat (Lawton) and Polly Wylly (Cooper) grew up in Ardsley Park jumping rope, riding push-mobles and climbing trees. They are now in their 80s and still best buddies.

As teens they wanted to be writers. *The Savannah Morning News* assigned them to cover cocktail parties. They called their first column “A Glance Askance.” The name was rejected. They renamed it “A View Askew!” It ended up as ... “Laura and Polly Say.”

Both girls badly wanted a horse and bought a skinny old nag for \$25. The poor animal collapsed when Polly got boosted onto her back. They fattened her up with alfalfa hay and oats and taught her to pull water skis at Tybee. She lived three happy years with their lavish pampering.

Both were debutantes in 1959. Johnny Mercer, famous songwriter of “Moon River”, “You Must’ve Been a Beautiful Baby”, and thousands more, had a huge party for them in the old Desoto Hotel with two bands. Then, they both went off to different colleges.

They’ve written six local history books together, including the just-released, *Bethesda Days Adventures in the Orphanage*. This fascinating book walks you through the history of one of Savannah’s most beloved



Polly and Laura holding their new book joined by Bethesda’s Burro Brownie

Continued on page 6 -



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# Front Porch

BY CHRIS BRANTLEY, EDITOR

When I grow up, I want to be like Polly Cooper and Laura Lawton. I'm 57 and about to be a grandpa (it's a boy) in September, so I'm feeling a little older than usual at the moment. So when I see folks in their 80s still living with gusto, it inspires me. Laura and Polly write books, play in a band (The World Famous Crabettes), and do lots of stuff I don't even know about. They embody what it means to be young at heart.

When I feel weary and like the thrill of living is slipping away. I can hear people like this saying, "Nope, kid, you've got a lot more life to live!" That's the way it should be, right?

So I hope you will sit back and read about Laura's and Polly's lives and their new book about Bethesda Home for Boys, one of Savannah's most cherished places. It's called *Bethesda Days Adventures at the Orphanage*. Find out how to purchase the book on page 7. Also, one of Isle of Hope's favorite events, The Isle of Hope Art and Music Festival, is coming soon. It happens on

**Continued on page 14 -**



## Isle of Hope News

**The Isle of Hope News is a quarterly publication serving Isle of Hope area residents & advertisers.**

**It was started by Isle of Hope resident Ed Yannett in 2011 and mails to 2,400+ residents in Isle of Hope, Dutch Island, and surrounding areas.**



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# Isle of Hope Art & Music Festival

## Set For October 25

BY ERICA WILSON

Fall is right around the corner, and the Isle of Hope Art and Music Festival is back! Mark your calendars for Saturday, October 25, when the bluff will come alive with art, music, food, and community fun.

This year's festival will feature 125 artists and tastemakers, 15 food trucks, and live music on two stages. The day kicks off at 10:00 AM with the Army Band marching down the bluff, followed by a curated music lineup brought to you by Magnolia Blooms Productions.

There's something for everyone to enjoy. Little ones will love the interactive kids' area in Paxton Park, with plenty of activities to keep them entertained. Mr. Puppet, back by popular demand, will perform at 11:00 AM and 2:00 PM.

We couldn't make this event happen without our amazing volunteers! Sign up on our website to help out and receive a free volunteer T-shirt. There are a variety of jobs to choose from—come be part of the fun behind the scenes.



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### Event Details:

**When: Saturday, October 25**

**Artists: 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM**

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**Where: IOH TPG Marina,  
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# Laura and Polly's New Book About Bethesda

Continued from the cover -

institutions, The Bethesda Home for Boys. In the Prologue, Noel Wright shares some memories of Bethesda and its boys, including this anecdote from 1943.

"The mighty Tigers with our fancy jerseys, shoes, and pads lined up on one side of the field with the ragged Bethesda boys facing us. We were surprised to learn they had no uniforms, pads or shoes. We were smug enough to think we would run mercilessly all over them.

Both teams waited breathlessly for the kick-off whistle. When it shrilled, the reality dawned on us mighty Tigers. The playing field was full of stickers (cockspurs). The barefoot Bethesda boys sprinted over them like Brer Rabbit in the briar patch. When we were tackled to the ground, we jumped up with painful cockspurs jabbing into our tender skin! Our enthusiasm for the game vanished.

Bethesda was jubilant over their overwhelming victory!"

Following that, Laura and Polly introduce the tale of George Whitefield and James Habersham traveling to Georgia to start the orphanage:

"Two young men gripped on to the railing of the deck of the ship *Whitaker* as the waves crashed against the prow. They had left their native England two months earlier, on December 28, 1737, and were approaching a new and strange land with a purpose given them by God. Their intent was to provide a place for orphaned children in the new colony of Georgia, not realizing that the institution they established would continue until the present day."

The two men laid the orphanage's first brick on March 25, 1740. Bethesda, meaning House of Mercy in Hebrew, still stands on Ferguson Avenue on the same 500 acres of land that the trustees of Georgia granted 285 years ago.

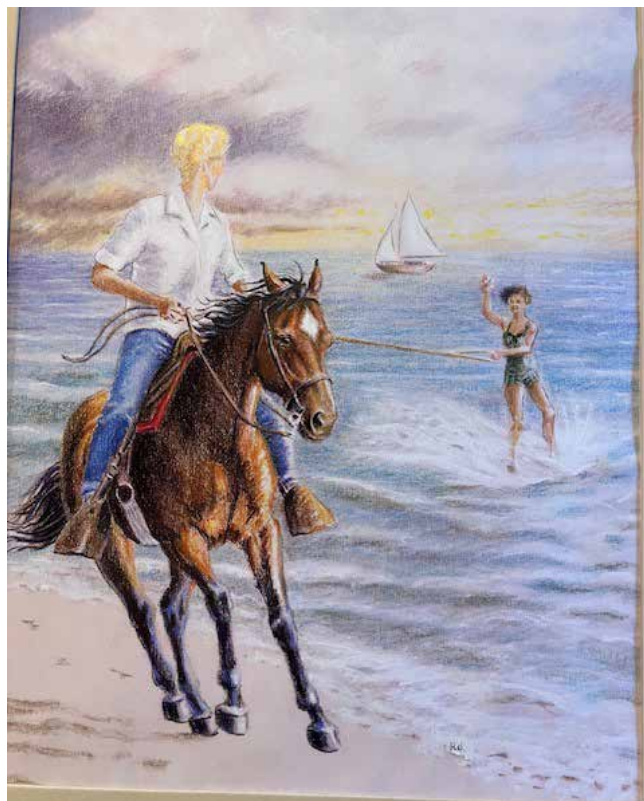
Rev. Whitefield, a well-known and flamboyant Methodist preacher, traveled around the country to preach and raise money for Bethesda. When he died, he left the orphanage to Lady Huntingdon in his will. She had been an avid supporter of Whitefield's ministry and the Savannah orphanage throughout her lifetime. Unfortunately, she was never able to visit Bethesda in Savannah.

Laura and Polly also share the stories of many key leaders, teachers, and mentors—like Ole Burroughs, who served as Superintendent from 1915 to 1945. They bring to life some of Bethesda's most memorable characters — the boys — ranging from Barney Diamond, its most generous alumnus, to the eccentric Arthur Brannan. The book also features a rich collection of photos from Bethesda's history, including several never published before.

Laura and Polly interviewed many elderly gentlemen to learn about their stories, pranks, adventures, and hardships while growing up in the orphanage. All the boys were taught a love of God, a love of learning, and a strong work ethic.

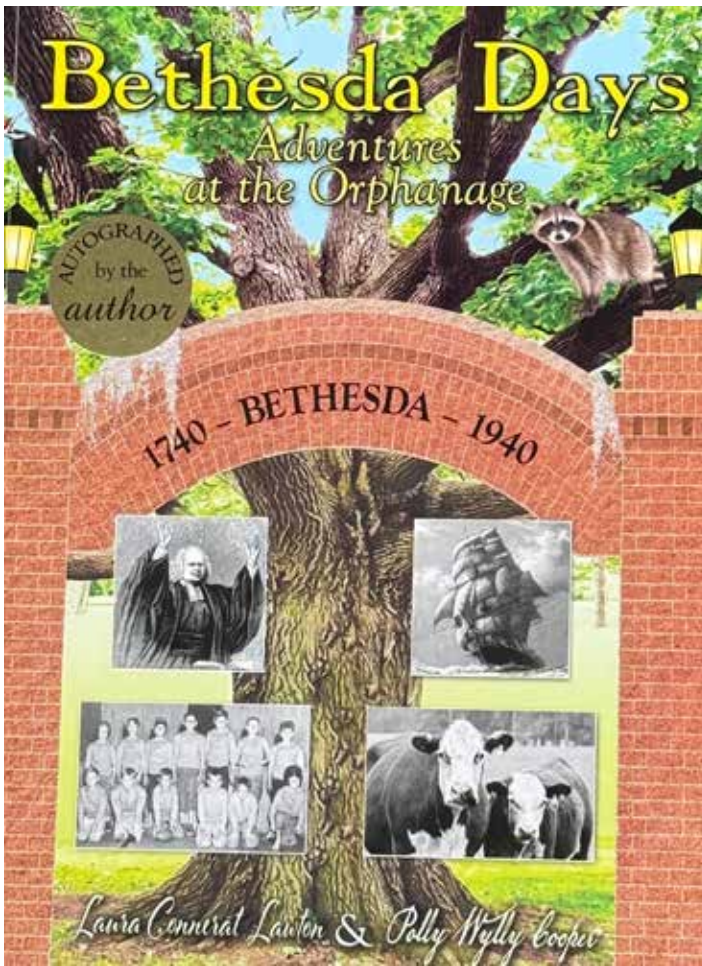


**Laura and Polly as Debutantes in 1959**



**When they were younger, Polly and Laura saved Cyclops from the glue factory and taught her to pull water skis on Tybee's Back River**





To purchase *Bethesda Days* (\$25), contact Laura at 912-925-5644 or [lauralawton@att.net](mailto:lauralawton@att.net) or Polly at 912-308-0063 or [cooperpolly@gmail.com](mailto:cooperpolly@gmail.com)



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# Ask?

## Mr. Ed

Straight From The Horse's Mouth



## From Pirate Ship to Fresh Eggs: The Backyard Keeps Evolving

By Ed Yannett, Savannah Real Estate Advisor

*Ed - is a seasoned real estate agent and contractor in Savannah, GA. With over 35 years of experience in real estate, construction, and property management, he helps buyers, sellers, and investors navigate the market. Learn more at [www.myhomesavannah.com](http://www.myhomesavannah.com).*

If you read last month's story, you know our backyard used to be home to a pirate ship—a two-story fortress of imagination. I built it for my sons over 20 years ago. Since then, the ship has officially sailed.

Well it actually fell down so we took it down completely.

But the story didn't end there.

The chicken coop we built from the swing set and pirate ship wood is now alive with clucking. The chickens are growing fast, and lately we've been getting two to three eggs a day. It's become part of our rhythm, letting them out into their little backyard, watching them scratch around, and collecting fresh eggs.

We put up a green nylon fence so they have their own little space to roam, their own backyard. Charlie even built a back door to the coop and added a covered shelter for

them. It has turned into something special.

That same backyard, once full of birthday parties, epic kickball games and sword fights, now gives us new joy. We sit and watch the chickens, laugh at their personalities, and marvel at how life shifts with the seasons.

Charlie also rebuilt the front and back steps—both had started to rot and fall apart. Little by little, things are being rebuilt with care and intention with help from the next generation.

This is the evolution of home. Not just the property, but the people growing inside it. The boys are





men now. The pirate ship is gone, but the love and effort we put into that space is still here, just wearing a different form.

And for me, that's one of the greatest gifts of owning your own home: watching it change and grow as your life does. That's the one constant in life it is always changing!

The truth is, I learned construction through homeownership. By fixing my own place and remodeling it to make it work for our family. Ed Beck's Low Country Home Services came out of that, born not from a business plan, but from years of figuring it out one project at a time. And honestly, with 20 minutes and a YouTube video, most people can do more than they think.

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# From Ignored to Restored

BY POLLY COOPER

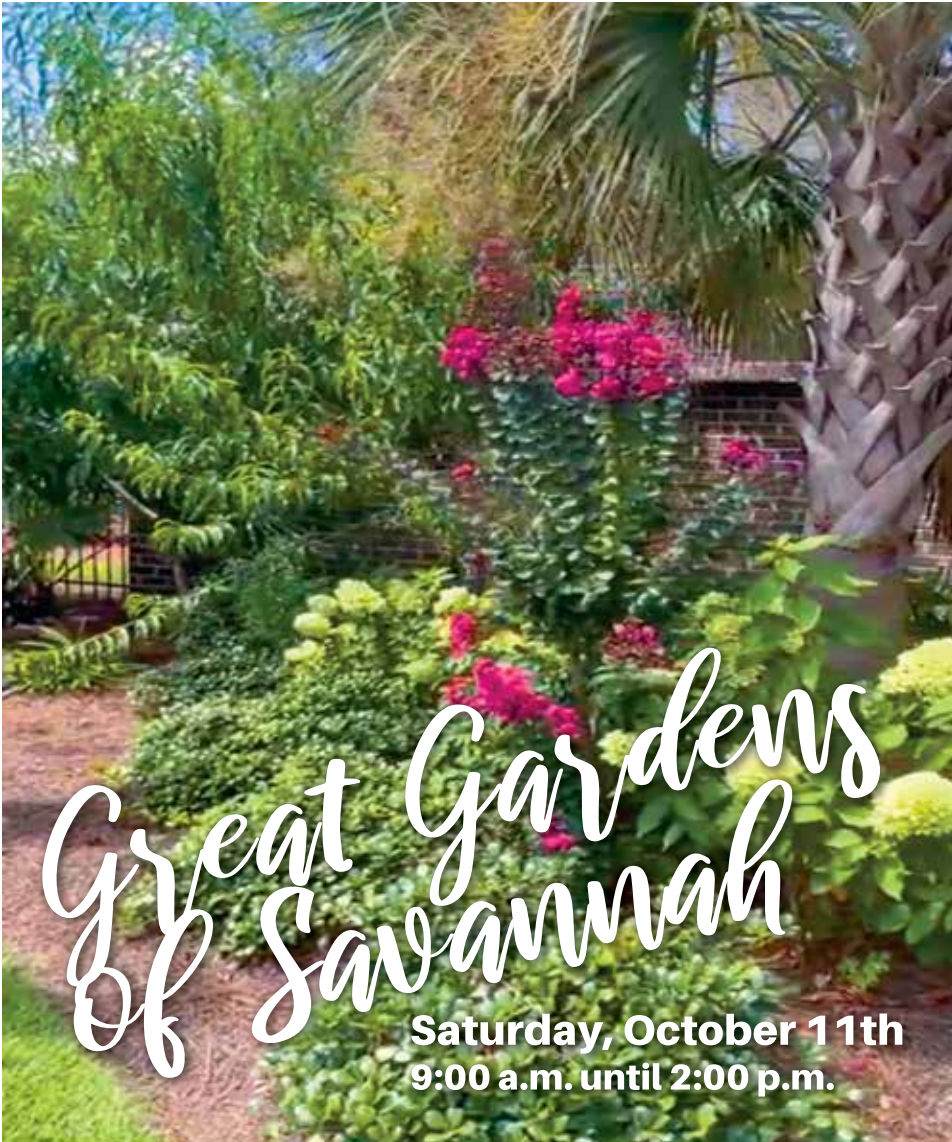
Thanks to John “Jack” Varnedoe who restored this ailing churn back to life, the old custom of churning ice cream after church on Sundays may rise again! Jack is a

highly talented and skilled man who worked for years at the Isle of Hope Marina as a boat mechanic. He also repaired yachts traveling along the inland waterway from north to



south.

The evidence shows in these “before and after” pictures of the badly decayed pine wood ice cream churn owned by Dr. and Mrs. Julian Chisholm. They had



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**Continued on page 11 -**





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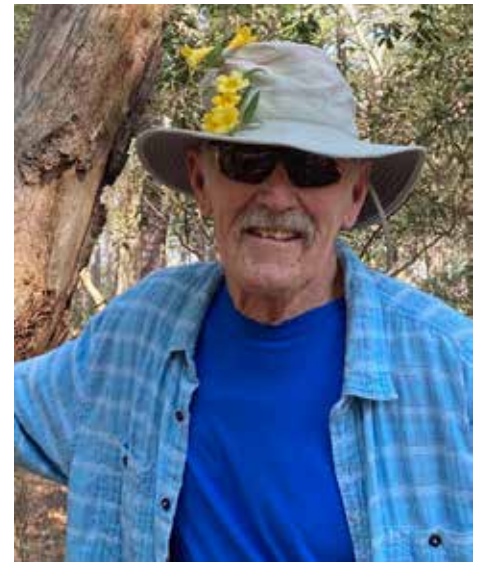
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### **John “Jack” Varnedoe**

a summer home at Vernon View. Children and neighbors loved Sundays for the ritual of turning the crank handle which turned the dasher inside the cylinder on the churn to make peach ice cream. Mrs. Chisholm had made custard the day before. What a special Sunday treat!

Her favorite saying was “the handle of the churn needs turning or for ice cream, you’ll be yearning!” With hungry howling stomachs, youngsters lined up with glee.

The metal straps around the body of the churn presented a real challenge for Jack. Teeth marks were evident from where mice had tried to chew into the wooden bucket. Rust was rampant and the churn was near extinction. Owned by Polly Cooper, the Chisholm’s granddaughter. She showed it to Jack who rolled up his sleeves and skillfully salvaged it.

Thanks to Jack Varnedoe’s brilliant work and ingenuity, future generations, of children will want to churn up some delicious super-duper peach ice cream!



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# Martin de Porres Society Lifts Up Savannah's Underserved Youth

BY CHRIS BRANTLEY

The Martin de Porres Society, a non-profit founded in 1986 by Dr. George Negron and his wife, Yolanda Negron, is rooted in Christian values and inspired by the legacy of its patron saint, Saint Martin de Porres. The Society was born from the Negrons' vision to carry on Martin de Porres' mission. Now their daughter, Maria Verwiell, continues that tradition.

The Patron Saint of the Society served as a Dominican lay brother in 17th-century Peru. He was known for his humility, charitable work among the poor, and defiance of social barriers in 17th-century Peru. De Porres founded an orphanage and a children's hospital while championing social justice. Now, he serves as a powerful symbol for the Society's present-day outreach efforts supporting the educational, social, and emotional needs of children and families in underserved communities in Savannah, GA.

The Society fulfills this mission through Camp Lighthouse, a summer experience fusing creative arts and life skills training. This past summer Red Gates Farm hosted the summer camp for 100 children and volunteers. The organization also provides, among other things, structured developmental mentorship through Leaders in Training (LIT) Mentoring, in-school tutorial

services, and back-to-school initiatives that give school supplies to children in the local schools.

This year, the Society will host its 33rd Annual Christmas Blessing on December 19th, bringing together various individuals and community organizations to present toys, games, and books to 200 underserved children in the Savannah area.

The Martin de Porres Society invites you to join them and

participate in these upcoming events:

A Dance, featuring Latin and Decade dances, which will take place at the Isle of Hope Marina on November 8th. Followed by a fundraising Gala, featuring the Equinox Orchestra, at The Landings Palmetto Club on March 21, 2026. To learn more about the Martin de Porres Society and how you can get involved, go to [martindeporressociety.org](http://martindeporressociety.org).

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Featuring the Equinox Orchestra

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Founders, Dr. George L. & Mrs. Yolanda S. Negron

# Front Porch

Continued from page 2 -

October 25. Check out page 4 for all the details, plus the Music Lineup. And, to volunteer, visit their website to sign up.

Speaking of fun events on the island. Are you ready to dance the night away? The Martin de Porres Society will host a Dance at the Isle of Hope Marina on November 8th. There will be Latin dancing, including the Salsa and Merengue, plus a live DJ will play songs from various decades. You can find out more about this event and the good work the de Porres Society is doing on page 13.

This issue includes the second installment of Mr. Ed's Pirate Ship Stories on pages 8 and 9. Forget UGA football games, they've got front row seats to

watch the chickens.

Finally, we always like to throw a bit of history or nostalgia into the mix. This month, it's a tale of an abandoned, decaying ice cream churn that was discovered and restored to its former glory. Read the story on pages 10 and 11. If we're lucky, maybe Polly will revive the Sunday tradition of Ice Cream Socials.

Thanks again to all our advertisers. We appreciate your support. I hope all our readers will support them.

We want to hear from you. If you have any submissions, ideas for stories, or feedback, send them my way:

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