

the twentieth century. Although several Antebellum period rice plantations were built to the east along the lower St. Marys and Satilla Rivers, no plantations were present close to the Okefenokee Swamp (Kirkland and Cook 2007:19).

The Georgia Legislature sold the swamp to the Suwanee Canal Company, comprised of former Confederate officers and wealthy investors, in 1891. That year, the canal company began digging over twenty miles of ditches and canal to drain the swamp to the St. Marys River through Trail Ridge to create arable lands for rice, sugar cane, and cotton farming. A sawmill was built to harvest logs using steamboats and steam-powered equipment. By the early twentieth century, however, the abundant railroads allowed for the construction of sawmills, turpentine stills, and extensive logging bringing an influx of people to fill these industry jobs (Trowell 1998b; Kirkland and Cook 2007:19-20).

Over the twentieth century, the swamp property went through a few different hands. By 1901, the property owned by the former Suwanee Canal Company was in the possession of Charles Hebard of Philadelphia who owned extensive lumber businesses in Michigan and Pennsylvania. After he died in 1901, his sons took over and formed the Hebard Lumber Company of Thomas County, Georgia in 1904. They leased the Okefenokee Swamp property to a subsidiary, the Hebard Cypress Company of West Virginia, who harvested cypress from the swamp from 1909 to 1927. A large sawmill was built west of Waycross to manufacture lumber and shingles and a settlement known as Hebardville grew up around the mill. A rail line, the Waycross and Southern, was completed from Hebardville to the northwestern edge of the swamp in 1909-1910 and from there, railroads were built throughout the swamp to log cypress trees from the northern and western areas. A number of smaller logging companies had joined the effort with logging camps established on Billy's Island, at The Pocket, and on Jones Island by 1918. Logging continued until the depletion of old growth cypress by the mid-1920s by which time the larger companies were shutting down with the last logging operations completed in 1942 (Trowell 1998b; Kirkland and Cook 2007:20).

The Hebard family had built a small cabin on Floyds Island within the Okefenokee Swamp in 1925, which was used as a private hunting and fishing resort until the mid-1930s. It remains in good condition as a camping and research facility listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Calls for preservation of the Okefenokee Swamp began as early as 1902 by geographer Roland M. Harper and supported by scientists from Cornell University who began studying the swamp after 1912. Although the Okefenokee Society was organized by 1919 to further the cause of swamp preservation, the organization died two years later. In 1929, the Georgia Society of Naturalists was organized and worked to lobby the Georgia legislature to convince the federal government to purchase the property. Although several Georgia politicians introduced congressional bills thereafter to preserve the swamp, their attempts failed (Trowell 1998b; Kirkland and Cook 2007:20-21).

In 1936, the federal government finally purchased 292,979 acres owned by Hebard Lumber Company and President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 7593 to create the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (ONWR) in 1937. The ONWR was established largely to provide a breeding ground for wildlife including migratory birds. Between 1938 and 1941, two Civilian Conservation Corps camps were established to develop the refuge's facilities including an all-black unit. Okefenokee Swamp Park opened on Cowhouse Island in 1946 and in 1947, the Okefenokee Recreation, Inc. of Homerville was allowed to build and operate Camp Stephen Foster on Jones Island, which was sold to the state of Georgia in 1954 to become the Stephen C. Foster State Park. The ONWR, managed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service since 1937, became part of the National Wilderness System in 1974 with the development of a Wilderness Canoe Trail system throughout the swamp. The Ramsar Convention recognized the swamp as a Wetland of International Importance in 1986 and the ONWR has increased to 371,000 acres since its original purchase (Trowell 1998b; Kirkland and Cook 2007:23-24).