

D. Paul Sommerville
April 30, 2016
Santa Elena History Center Grand Opening and Inaugural Exhibit

Distinguished guests and friends, welcome to this special occasion y especialmente bienvenidos al estimado Candido Creis. Consul General De Espana y Coronel Fernando Valencia, Atache militar de Espana. It is a pleasure to join you today and an honor to help provide welcome and congratulatory remarks, as we celebrate the grand opening of the Santa Elena History Center and its inaugural exhibit. I want to thank the Santa Elena Foundation and all whose efforts have brought this Center and exhibit to fruition and made this grand opening event possible.

Today, we recognize and celebrate the establishment of the Santa Elena History Center, which will help tell the story of the important role that this area played in shaping the European exploration and colonization of North America many centuries ago.

The English settlement of Jamestown, Virginia may be known as modern America's birthplace, but North America's first colonial capital was actually established four decades earlier and 400 miles away from Jamestown right here in Beaufort County, South Carolina and located on our very own Parris Island.

Known to all English, French and Spaniards in the 16th century, Santa Elena represented a heroic spirit of expectation for a brighter today and better tomorrow. The daring individuals who came to our shores 450 years ago knew just how special and geographically significant this area was, and it still is today. Like Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, Jean Ribault, and other explorers of that age, we know the Port Royal Sound and our local waterways are exceptional and critical to the health and prosperity of this region.

We are still a place where cultures collide, as Beaufort County is home and host to those from near and far. Those of us who live and work in Beaufort County take great pride in the history and culture of this area and we strongly support the Santa Elena Foundation and all organizations in our community working to uncover and preserve the past, while sharing it with the public.

The transformation of the County-owned Federal Courthouse on Bay Street into the Santa Elena History Center will help us share the Santa Elena story with generations to come and with not only those who live locally, but also those who live across America and around the world.

I hope that you enjoy today's events and that you will tell everyone you know about this remarkable facility and the fascinating story of Santa Elena, and that you invite them to visit and help spread the word about this forgotten story that will no longer be overlooked.

Thank you all for being here today and congratulations to the Santa Elena Foundation. The best is yet to come.