

How Gullah Geechee impact Brunswick County: 4 things to know

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Gullah Geechee cultural influence has been identified in several southern states, including North Carolina.

By Makenzie Holland StarNews Staff

BRUNSWICK COUNTY -- Descendants of a West African tribe known as Gullah Geechee have played a role in the area for hundreds of years.

Descendants of the tribes were discovered to be skillful rice planters, said Navassa Mayor Eulis Willis. They were captured and brought to the United States to work on rice plantations, some of which were in Navassa. All along the Cape Fear River, from Southport to Bladen County, were a "preponderance" of rice plantations, he said.

Over the course of 300 years, between 75 and 80 rice plantations cropped up along the banks of the Cape Fear, and with those plantations came Gullah Geechee workers.

After the Civil War, Willis said ex-slaves settled in the communities where they had worked, including Navassa.

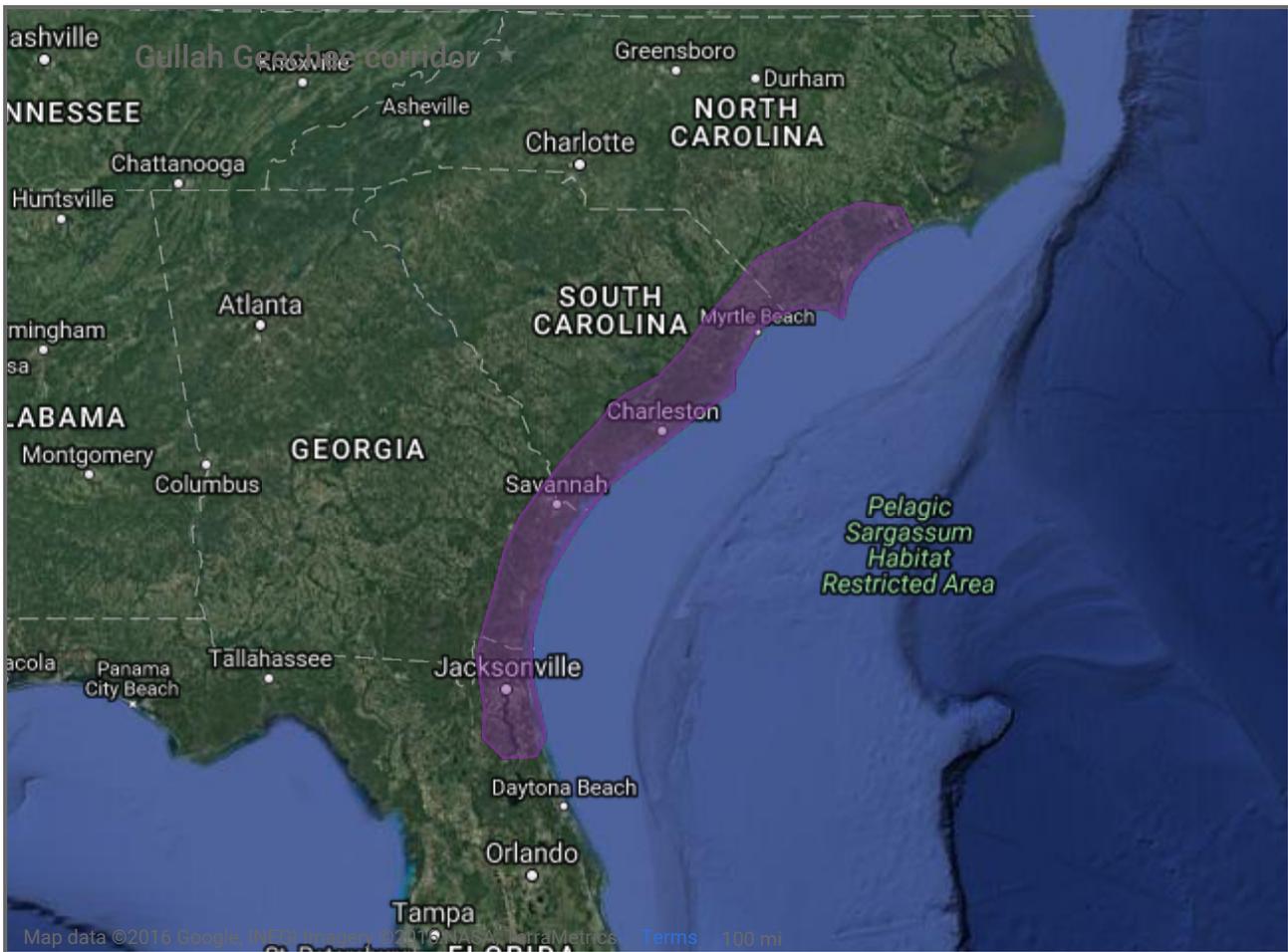
In the last few years, efforts have been made to recognize Gullah Geechee culture and heritage. Here are four things to know about how efforts affect Brunswick County.

1. Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor established: Since 2006, a federally-funded heritage corridor extends from Florida to Southeastern North Carolina. Its purpose is to protect and restore historic Gullah Geechee sites, preserve history and establish exhibits and programs in each state for cultural education.

2. Corridor commission formed: Along with the corridor, a 15-member commission was created to oversee up to \$10 million over 10 years for preserving the corridor. Willis, a member of the commission, said the commission is working to implement a management plan to preserve Gullah Geechee culture.

3. Heritage center: Earlier this year, the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation **awarded** the N.C. Coastal Land Trust and town of Navassa a \$25,000 grant. The grant will pay for concept plans for a North Carolina Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Center and for protecting lands with Gullah Geechee significance in the Navassa area.

4. Appreciation Week: Earlier this month, Brunswick County commissioners declared the week of July 30 to Aug. 7 as **Gullah Geechee Nation** Appreciation Week. The week celebrates Gullah Geechee culture through music, food, presentations and crafts. Marquetta Goodwine of the Gullah Geechee Nation said this is the first year both Brunswick and Pender counties have participated.



Reporter Makenzie Holland can be reached at 910-343-2371 or Makenzie.Holland@StarNewsOnline.com.