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Johnny Mercer and Valentine's Gala to Highlight 2009 Georgia Days Events

SAVANNAH, GA. November 14, 2008. The Georgia Historical Society (GHS) today announced the schedule of events for Georgia Days 2009, to be held February 3-14 in commemoration of the 276th anniversary of the founding of the Georgia colony. Thousands of parents, students, educators, and governmental officials participate in the Society's annual statewide event.

Each year during the Georgia Days series of events, GHS honors individuals who have significantly influenced Georgia and American history. Taking a page from modern history and popular culture, the Society has named Savannah native and American music legend Johnny Mercer as Historic Honoree of the 2009 celebration.

"Next year is the centennial of Johnny Mercer's birth," says GHS President and CEO Dr. Todd Groce, "and we are pleased and proud to join others across the state as we honor this native son whose remarkable 50-year career was deeply grounded in and influenced by his Savannah and Georgia roots."

In addition to traditional events that include the Colonial Faire and Muster at Wormsloe, Super Museum Sunday, Black History Month Essay and Public Speaking Contest, and school children, costumed characters and dignitaries parading through Savannah's historic district, the Georgia Days 2009 will feature the second annual Birthday Bash and Annual Award Gala, entitled *Magic in the Moonlight*.

"Our inaugural gala was a wonderfully well received success," says Laura Garcia-Culler, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of the Society, "and *Magic in the Moonlight* will provide our members and friends with a memorable, very romantic night out on February 14, Valentine's Day."

"In addition to fine dining and dancing, and the music of Johnny Mercer, political commentators James Carville and Mary Matalin – Washington's most captivating couple – will keynote the event with a talk entitled *All's Fair in Love, War and Politics*. The evening will also include Governor Sonny Perdue inducting the first new Georgia Trustees since 1749, part of an exciting new partnership between the GHS and the State of Georgia that will annually recognize in perpetuity selected Georgians who have made outstanding contributions to our state's history. Home Depot co-founder Bernie Marcus will be in attendance for his induction as one of the first Georgia Trustees in 260 years."

Born in downtown Savannah in 1909, young Johnny Mercer absorbed the rich musical culture of coastal Georgia. He spent time in his youth at the Pin Point Oyster Company on the Back River, later renamed Moon River, listening to songs in the Geechee dialect that would later inspire his world-famous lyrics. He wrote his first song at age 15 and, without formal musical training, went on to pen over 1,000 songs; collaborate with such well-known musical talents as Hoagy Carmichael, Harold Arlen, Marvin Hamlisch, Bobby Darin, and Andre Previn; and win four Academy Awards®. As a co-founder of Capitol Records, he was instrumental in discovering and launching the careers of Nat "King" Cole, Stan Kenton and Peggy Lee, among others.

Johnny Mercer's music will be featured throughout the Georgia Days schedule. Less well known are his talents as an illustrator and painter, and the public is invited to view examples of his drawings and paintings, hear his

music, and enjoy champagne and sweets at the Georgia Days Kickoff event, *Pardon My Southern Accent: The Life and Legacy of Johnny Mercer in Word, Song, and Art*, to be held February 3 at Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church on Calhoun Square in downtown Savannah.

Below is a complete list of Georgia Days 2009 events commemorating the founding of the Georgia Colony. Note that some times and locations may change or are yet to be determined. Check www.georgiahistory.com for the latest information.

Georgia Days Kickoff Event

Pardon My Southern Accent: The Life and Legacy of Johnny Mercer in Word, Song, and Art

Tuesday, February 3, 2009

In this family-friendly event, professional entertainer Jim Wann explores the life and contributions of Savannah's own Johnny Mercer by providing biographical information interspersed with musical selections from Mercer's extensive body of work, as well as personal reminiscences of Johnny collected from local Savannahians. A reception that will include a rare viewing of several of Mercer's original watercolors, as well as a display of Mercer's childhood art will continue the exploration of this multi-talented artist. Enjoy a live concert of the music of 2009 Historic Honoree Johnny Mercer. Free and open to the public.

Georgia Days Colonial Faire and Muster

Saturday (Family Day) and Sunday, February 7-8, 2009

Wormsloe State Historic Site

Friends and families of all ages enjoy this popular annual living history program featuring hundreds of costumed interpreters performing colonial-era military drill, dance, and music at the site of one of Georgia's oldest and most beautiful coastal plantations. Demonstrations of musket and canon firing, crafts, and other aspects of daily life in the eighteenth century are given throughout this weekend-long event. Schedule of events is available upon arrival at this event.

Super Museum Sunday

Sunday, February 8, 2009, 12:00 – 4:00 PM

Multiple Savannah-area sites (visit www.georgiahistory.com after January 1, 2009 for museum list, or contact individual sites of interest)

Georgians and visitors alike experience coastal Georgia's rich history and cultural life as historic sites, house museums, art museums, and other points of interest in Savannah and coastal Georgia open their doors to the public at no charge during this annual GHS's Georgia Days family event. From Statesboro to Darien, more than 40 sites participate in this event, providing visitors a rare opportunity to experience the history in our own backyard.

Black History Month Essay and Public Speaking Contest

Monday, February 9, 2009, 5:30 PM

Georgia Historical Society, 501 Whitaker Street, Savannah

Open to area middle and high school students, the 2009 contest will focus on Savannah in the Civil Rights Movement. Students and teachers should visit www.georgiahistory.com and follow the Georgia Days link for more information on the contest. Finalists from the essay portion will compete in a public speaking event to be held at the Georgia Historical Society and judged by an independent panel representing the academic and media communities. Prizes to be awarded. Reception to follow.

Georgia Days Dignitaries Coffee

Thursday, February 12, 2009, 9:00 AM

Sponsored by The Savannah Bank

An invitation-only event for dignitaries, sponsors and special guests prior to the Georgia Day Parade start. This year will feature the unveiling of new plaques honoring the creators of named endowment funds at the Georgia Historical Society.

Georgia Day Parade

February 12, 2009, 10:30 AM

Bull Street from Forsyth Park to City Hall

Thousands of costumed local elementary school children march behind student-made banners in commemoration of Georgia's founding in 1733. This colorful parade of students, local dignitaries, costumed characters, musicians, and a military color guard begins at Forsyth Park and ends with a program in front of City Hall, where the mayor and other officials bring greetings and awards are presented for the annual Banner Competition.

Georgia Days Birthday Bash and Annual Awards Gala

Saturday, February 14, 2009, 7:00 PM

Hyatt Regency – Savannah

Sponsored by Southern LNG an El Paso Company

Tickets \$250 each

Magic in the Moonlight, a romantic, entertaining, black-tie Valentine's celebration to benefit GHS educational programs and activities. Order tickets early. To purchase tickets visit our website at www.georgiahistory.com or call 912.651.2125 Ext. 20.

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Additional educational events (visit www.georgiahistory.com) supported in part by:



The Georgia Historical Society, headquartered in Savannah, is a preeminent educational and research institution and the first and only statewide historical society in Georgia. It is the oldest cultural organization in the state and one of the oldest historical societies in the nation. For nearly 175 years, GHS has collected, preserved, and shared Georgia and American history through a variety of educational outreach programs, publications, and research services. For more information visit: www.georgiahistory.com.

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