

ST. AUGUSTINE ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



A CHAPTER OF THE FLORIDA ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

February 2026

Upcoming Programs

Flagler College, Tiffany Room
7 pm

February 3, 2026

Maranda Kles, PhD, President of FAS
*"Building Memories: Locating Lost Cemeteries
and Re-Defining These Sacred Spaces"*

March 3, 2026

Guy Prentice, retired National Park Service
Southeast Archaeological Center
*"Andersonville Reexamined: An Archeological
and Historical Study of the Civil War's Most
Infamous Prisoner of War Camp."*

April 7, 2026

Sarah Miller with an update from FPAN

May 5, 2026

Chuck Meade with his annual update
from LAMP

SAAA Mission Statement

The St. Augustine Archaeological Association promotes the discovery, interpretation, and protection of cultural heritage in the greater St. Augustine area by engaging our community in archaeological research, volunteerism, and education.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hello fellow archaeology fans,

I am so excited to step into the role of President for this,

SAAA's 40th Anniversary. I

began attending meetings my

freshman year of Flagler College, and you haven't gotten rid of me yet!



In addition to my new role as President, Bob Maerz has stepped into my now vacant position of Vice President.

We also have four new Board members, Deborah

Karably, Elizabeth Bass, Brad Biglow, and Carl

Lindenfeld. That means that we have had other

reshuffling of positions. Janet Fittipaldi is now the

Corresponding Secretary, and Nick McAuliffe has

accepted the role of Assistant Treasurer. Katherine

Sims remains on the board as Past President. As you

run into them, please join me in thanking them for the

time and efforts they have put into our organization.

If you have a little free time on your hands, we are always looking for fresh faces to join one of our committees. We have something for every interest. Just drop us an email to staugarch@gmail.com, or grab me at a meeting or any time you see me, and I'll be happy to tell you about the options.

As our 40th year begins, we have a wonderful variety of speakers through the end of Spring, and I look forward to these as well many fun and informative events coming up.

I look forward to seeing everyone soon,

Courtney Crum

Holiday Party ELEF Basket Raffle

Continuing an upward trend over the past three years, the basket raffle raised \$331 for the Eugene Lyon Education Fund (ELEF) at the SAAA Holiday Party in December. The lucky winners were Robert Phillips, Robbie Boggs, and Wayne Smith.

Be sure to frequent these businesses who donated Products and services for this year's baskets.

Tour St. Augustine
Foxtail Coffee
St. Augustine Alligator Farm
Jensen Pottery
Meehan's
River & Fort
Blue Hen

Thanks, everyone, for your participation!

By-Laws Review

At the Annual Meeting in January, the membership voted on and passed three amendments to the SAAA By-Laws —1) adopting the new officer position of Assistant Treasurer, 2) requiring an annual internal audit of the organization's finances, and 3) the recognition of the ELEF and Historic Marker standing committees.

Nevertheless, it has been at least nine years since the SAAA By-Laws had a thorough review. The Board would like to appoint a committee to begin this process this winter, and would like input from a person outside the board. If anyone is interested in serving on this committee, please contact the chairperson, Linda Chandler, at ljchandler2448@gmail.com

Increase in Dues

SAAA has not raised its dues for many years, but as of January 1, 2026 dues have increased to --

\$30 for a family

\$20 for an individual

\$ 5 for students (remains the same)

The "dues year" runs from March to March, so be sure to pay by March to remain a member in good standing. You can pay in person at a monthly meeting, through our website, www.staugarch.org, or by mail, PO Box 1301, St. Augustine, FL 32085.

SAAA Board of Directors

President – **Courtney Crum** courtneycrum@aol.com

Vice President – **Bob Maerz** bobmaerz@aol.com

Recording Secretary – **Suzanne Dixon**

Suzdixon55@yahoo.com

Corresponding Sec'y – **Janet Fittipaldi**

arkyfit@verizon.net

Treasurer – **Don Roberts** dwrobertz@gmail.com

Ass't Treasurer -- **Nick McAuliffe** nmcauliff@yahoo.com

Program Chair – **Chris Newman** guppy@aug.com

Directors at Large--

Jon Simon Suarez (one year) jssone@gmail.com

Elizabeth Bass (one year) ebkarstens@gmail.com

Carl Lindenfeld (one year) cjln2@yahoo.com

Deborah Karably (3 years) grantetc@gmail.com

Brad Biglow (3 years) brad.biglow@fscj.edu

Special Program of Interest Presented by the St. Augustine Jewish Historical Society--

“The Forbidden Voyagers of 1565: Escaping the Inquisition”

Dr. Roger Martínez-Dávila

Wednesday, March 4, 2026 - 4:00 pm
Flagler College - Ponce de Leon Hall - Flagler Room

In 1565, Spanish law was clear: anyone of Jewish descent was strictly forbidden from setting foot in the New World.

Yet, beneath the official records of Florida's earliest military expedition, a different story was being written in the shadows.

Seating is very limited. Registration is required.

For additional details and to reserve your seat go to <https://sajhs.com/events/>

Pics from the Holiday Party



Feature Article



The Mystery of Easter Island

by Linda Chandler



So, what is this place, this island with the strange, giant heads looking inland from the sea-- This place

known as *Rapa Nui* or *Easter Island*?

Who lived there? Who carved the heads, and how? And how were they moved from the quarry site to their platforms near the shore? Or even, how was this island, the most remote place on earth, 2650 miles from French Polynesia and 2300 miles from Chili, even settled?

Although Thor Heyerdahl postulated that the people of Rapa Nui may have voyaged there from South America, when the first European contact, a Dutch East India ship, arrived on Easter Day in 1722, the captain wrote that the people and language were similar to that of Samoa. Captain Cook, in 1774, confirmed this, noting that the people were quite similar in look, language, and customs to the other Polynesians he had encountered on his voyages.

Archaeologists are not sure exactly when the Polynesians reached this most far-flung and isolated island of the Pacific, but it is known that sometime during the first millennium CE, people began spreading out from Tonga and Samoa, exploring and island-hopping across the Pacific. Hawai'i was settled around 800 CE, and it is thought the Rapa Nui was finally reached around 900 CE, and it appears that the people very soon after arrival began carving stone torsos with over-sized heads similar to the wooden *tikis* found on other Polynesian islands.

When William J. Thompson surveyed the island for the Smithsonian Institution in 1886, his team recorded over 500 *moai* (stone figures) as well as temple platforms, boat-shaped stone house foundations, petroglyphs, and pictographs.

Rapa Nui is one of the smallest inhabited islands of the Pacific, being only about 15 miles across and 7 miles wide. Like Hawai'i, but unlike many Pacific islands, Rapa Nui was formed by the eruptions of several undersea volcanoes. European explorers found it "rocky, barren, and useless" and for a long time, ignored it, probably to the betterment of the native population.

Recent archaeological and paleobotanical evidence has revealed that the island was once densely forested with a species of giant palms over 100 feet tall, providing an essential resource for houses and canoes.

Archaeologists believe, however, that the island was deforested within a few centuries in order to open agricultural fields in the rich, volcanic soil.

There was a long-standing Polynesian custom of carving wooden figures of deities or honored chieftains and kings. Palm, however, is not an ideal wood for carving, but Rapa Nui had another resource—an abundance of volcanic rock, especially the tannish *tuft* from the extinct Rano Raraku volcano, which was soft enough to be carved with tools made from *basalt*, a much harder volcanic rock also found on the island. Some of the *moai* wear headdresses or topknots carved from red *scoria*, another volcanic stone.



It was unlikely that just anyone could go out and carve a *moai*. Like other aspects of Rapanui society, the quarry was divided along strict hierarchal lineage, tribal, and kinship groups with each related family having its own section of the quarry with higher-ranking groups having access to the higher quality stone.

The actual carving was carried out by a specialized group of professional stoneworkers, an elite and privileged class with food and other needs provided by the community at large. The creation of these sacred figures, usually commissioned by a tribal leader, was expensive in both time and man-power.

The carvers began by rough-shaping a figure of the desired size into the wall of the quarry with the figure lying on its back, slowly chipping away the stone above, around, and behind. Then, the carvers began more detailed work starting at the head with the features of the face, then moving to the arms and torso. Finally, the figure was carefully separated from the rock by carving down and across until only a “keel” was left along the back.

Once freed from the bedrock, the *moai* was carefully maneuvered downhill to a waiting shallow pit where the figure, once tipped in upright, was finished with carving designs on the back and an all-over smoothing. If one look carefully at the figures, one can see subtle differences in each one.



A view of the hillside below the Rano Raraku Quarry

The carvers did not deliver. Once finished, it was up to the commissioning group to move the *moai* to its permanent place on the island where it would be erected on a stone platform known as an *ahu*, always with their backs to the sea, facing their people’s village, where the first thing the villagers would see when they emerged from their houses in the morning would be these powerful ancestor protectors.

With the average *moai* measuring 13 feet tall and weighing around 14 tons, how in the world were they moved into place? The feat is especially perplexing since the Rapanui had no metal, draft animals, or wheeled carts. Over the past several decades, scholars have used experimental archaeology to try to solve this puzzle.

Satellite photography shows a web of ancient roads radiating out from the quarry. One theory is that the *moai* was dragged a short distance from the quarry to

the coast, placed onto a raft, and floated to its destination. There are at least 17 large canoe ramps around the island located near the old village sites, so this is a possibility.

Another theory is that the *moai* was laid on its back on a wooden sledge or framework and pulled by large groups of people using ropes and wooden rollers. A third theory, that seems to be gaining traction, is that the *moai*, standing upright, would be rocked or walked by teams pulling alternately on sets of ropes. In fact, Rapanui oral tradition says that the statues walked to their places! It is quite possible that different methods were used at different times and conditions. Once at the *ahu*, the *moai* could be maneuvered up a stone ramp and tipped or wiggled into position.

At any rate, there is little doubt that the Rapanui were innovative experts at moving the giant monoliths. How do you think they did it?

Read More:

Hunt, Terry and Carl Lippo. *The Statues that Walked: Unraveling the Mystery of Easter Island*. Counterpoint Press, Berkeley, CA, 2012. ISBN: 978-1619020207

Pitts, Michael. *Island at the Edge of the World: The Forgotten History of Easter Island*. Mariner Books, Boston, MA, 2026. ISBN: 978-0063344679

Urbanus, Jason. *Uncovering Easter Island*. Archaeological Institute of America, Boston, MA, 2022. ISBN: 978-1-931909-44-0

