



Photo by Troup Nightingale

Friends of Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation Newsletter
Volume #4 **Summer 2020**

Located at 5556 US Highway 17 N, Brunswick, GA,
at the intersection of GA 99, one mile east of I-95, exit 42

Visiting and Programming

We are now open in a semi-normal fashion Wednesday– Sunday 9-5. The visitor center is allowing 12 people inside at a time. The plantation house first floor is open. Before entering the house, the ranger will tell you about the history of the house, the families, and a little about rice production in coastal Georgia. There is a marked path through the house to aid in social distancing.

We are hopeful that this fall or winter we can have more activities at the park, but your health and safety are the primary consideration in planning.

(Ophelia Dent was the last owner of the Hofwyl– Broadfield Plantation)

Ophelia's Last Ride

By S.T. Lanter

The day was sunny and bright one day in the late 1950's. Ophelia was well past 70 as she cruised with the top down in her blue Chevrolet convertible. Enjoying the day, the fresh air, the wind in her snow-white hair, the sun shining brightly on her and through some strange alchemy turning her white hair to gold making it appear platinum blonde. As she toiled down Route 17, balancing her left elbow casually on car's door-frame, her right hand cavalierly high on the steering wheel she was the epitome of a care-free wanderer enjoying a drive in the country. A carload of teenage boys came up behind her and thinking her a beautiful young woman sought to gain her notice. They hooted, whistled, and blew their car's horn soliciting her attention. She led them on for a few moments deeply enjoying the encounter. Finally, the young driver swung into the oncoming lane to overtake the car and impress the pretty young woman driver. *In the mirror she could see in their faces the excitement and expectation of getting a beautiful woman's attention. Knowing what would happen, she slowly turned and waved to them. They saw the face of an old woman and their own faces turned ... crimson red. Hitting the accelerator full force they flew down the highway in humiliation. Ophelia chuckled with laughter, immensely pleased that the mixture of her looks and style had created such an image, even if for a few moments. She savored the humor of this situation ... [she was] a legend.*

Ophelia Troup Dent, like most Americans, was deeply in love with the automobile and the open road. Exactly when Ophelia learned to drive is unknown, possibly upon her return to Hofwyl in 1912—if not before in Connecticut. In an undated letter, from 1915 or 1916, reading between the lines, she indicated that she was quite experienced behind the wheel, writing:

We had the surprise of our lives last Saturday when Gratz went to town in a Ford & returned in a Chevrolet!!!! You could have knocked us over with a powder-puff!!! It seems that when he got into town a man offered him \$225 cash for the Ford and that was such a fine offer after 2 years & 2 months use out of it that Gratz accepted right off, & went to get another Ford. Well my dear, he couldn't get one in Brunswick, Jacksonville, or Savannah under 3 weeks & not certain then, so he just had to get another make, & chose the Chevrolet. It took me a day to learn to run it as the gears and everything are so entirely different & I just felt lost at first.... Now I'm crazy about it and if it does the work that the Ford did, I can't ask for anything better! It [the Ford] ran 28,000 miles between here & Brunswick: just think of that!

Even though many of the roads, mere tracks of mud, all but nonexistent in places, and trains guaranteed a comfortable trip to most destinations Ophelia liked to travel “by machine” if possible, for the adventure and independence of the open road was too alluring to pass up.

, we start [Friday] at 5 A.M. & motor up to Asheville 330 miles, up hill all the way & we are going to do it in one day!! Now don't you wish you were along!! She has a brand new Marmon & we made from Darien here over vile roads in 2 hrs. & 7 min. & barring all accidents we will get to Asheville in a day.

Ophelia was mad about cars and driving her letters peppered with references to automobiles.

Audrey has a stunning Stutz with tremendous power, and I have learned to run it, and now I know the joy of having a powerful machine to control. I'll never be able to enjoy the Chevrolet again, when I go to deliver milk!!

Ophelia loved to drive—fast! During an oral history interview a friend commented that Ophelia would leave Hofwyl with only twenty minutes to get to St. Simons for an appointment, a trip normally requiring thirty to thirty-five minutes, and get there on time! But with the freedom of the open road came perils as well.

Well, my dear, I came fairly near being killed last week, as near as I ever want to be, anyway. I was coming into town with 67 gallons of milk & sailing smoothly along ... and I suddenly looked up to see a huge truck laden with gasoline bearing down on top of me absolutely on my side of the road! I was so amazed I couldn't believe my eyes and after one feeble squeak of the horn I made for the ditch. Well when the man did wake up he was so near me that altho' he swerved out with his front wheels, his back wheels caught me amidships wrenched off the box with the 10 gal milk can on it, turned the entire 10 gals, on top of me, crushed in my back fender to kindling wood, knocked me into 2 mail boxes which completely tore off my running board on that side, & pretty well demolished that fender, too!!! Well my dear if you ever saw one frightened man, that was one!! He came back white-as a sheet and trembling all over, for the last he had seen of me was being drowned in milk. He said he just simply couldn't account for it that he was miles away, and had seen and heard absolutely nothing. He was awfully sorry and awfully worried over it, and that always makes you feel better' so I told him I would fix it up with the United Supply Co. and not to think anything more about it, which I did, & they were equally nice, & told me to go right ahead & have everything fixed which I did, & so tomorrow I get new fenders, running board & top, & the little Dodge won't know itself! ! Except for my milk bath I was absolutely untouched but I notice now I instinctively give every car coming a mighty wide berth.

Ophelia drove until cataracts blurred her vision until she had to lose her mobility, her independence. As her sight deteriorated she began to experience difficulty in finding the driveway entrance at Hofwyl. The highway department erected a large post by the driveway to guide her home. Her sight got bad enough that she reluctantly decided to go to the hospital and have the cataracts removed. Rudolph became her chauffeur. 3

But one day as Rudolph was bringing her home to Hofwyl from an in-town appointment her old self reasserted itself. “Rudolph,” she said. “Pull over. I want to drive!”



Fast forward to 2020 and the last car that Miss Ophelia owned:

The Bob Johnson Memorial Fund has reached it's first goal!

The Friends of Hofwyl have dedicated their efforts to repair Miss Ophelia Dent's 1970 Oldsmobile Cutlass to our long time friend Bob Johnson. Estimating the cost of initial repairs at \$3-\$5,000, collections began. Our 501c (a non-profit) matched all the funds we collected. With small and large donations coming in this winter and spring we finally had enough to begin repairs. There she goes out of the garage and off to the shop in Darien! A special thanks goes out to The Friends of Coastal History under the leader-



ship of Dwayne Harris. Their grant gave us a very good start on this project. Freddie Merritt of Fast Freddie's Hot Rods Inc. has done a terrific job on the repairs. Ralph Babb was also a skilled hand in the repair.

The tires were replaced with the correct striped tires that came on the car. A new radiator, and brakes were some of the more important replacements. The missing engine cap and brackets were found, and even the missing hub cap was matched. It is running great now. Next the rusting body was addressed. The two back fender panels were replaced and a paint job is scheduled for soon.

Bill Giles supervising the loading of Miss Ophelia's Ride!

The Friends of Howfyl- Broadfield Plantation appreciate Freddie Merritt (photo to the right) for his help with the repairs. It is so wonderful to have skilled mechanics in our community willing to tackle this classic car's needs.



Cutlass

We have had a great start on our project, but there are still items that should be addressed on the car as well as maintenance. If you are interested in making a monetary contribution, You can place your donation in the box located in the visitor's center. If you wish to send a check, please make it payable to "Friends of Hofwyl," and mail it to Gail Johnson, Treasurer, 164 Seminole Road, Brunswick, Georgia 31525, gail021945@gmail.com. Thanks! Also, the Friends of Howfyl want to thank our own member, Gordon Strother for his leadership in this project.



Left to right: Duane Harris, President of Coastal Georgia History, handing the check for \$1,500 to Bill Giles, Site Manager, and looking on is Mason Stewart, President of Friends of Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation and Gordon Strother, Trustee of Friends of Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation.

<https://www.sslt.org/index.php/news-events/199-20-in-20-spotlight-gordon-strother>

Here is an interesting article about our friend, Gordon Strother, who was recently honored for his leadership and contributions to the Saint Simons Land Trust. With family roots deep into St. Simons soil, and a store in the village bustling with activity, we are glad that he makes the time to take a leadership role as trustee for our Friends of Howfyl–Broadfield Plantation group.



Feeling cooped up? You don't have to be inside. Take a walk or bring a picnic out to the park. This is a great way to stay "social distanced". These trees were here the last time this virus came as a pandemic in 1917-1918. Their cool shade welcomes you.

Questions?

If you have any questions about the park or house tours, call the staff at 912-264-7333.

“Seeing the Elephant”

By

S.T. Lanter



George Columbus Dent ca. 1840. Courtesy of Hofwyl-Broadfield State Historical Site.

Seeing the elephant is an expression coined in the 1840's meaning to gain experience of the wider world, but experience gained at a significant cost to the individual. The Civil War generation of veterans coopted the expression to mean the experience of combat. George Dent “*saw the elephant*” first-hand.

George Dent's son James wrote of his father that he: “... *had always [had] a taste for military affairs....*” He was elected Captain of the McIntosh [County] Light Dragoons in the 1850's and Captain of the Glynn [County] Guards after he and Ophelia moved to claim her inheritance of West New Hope Plantation, Glynn County in 1856.

Militia companies in the years before the Civil War were social organizations as much as they were military. Training involved uniforms, marching, pomp, parades and picnics with the members families. Militia service was a manly obligation but a pleasant one—a temporary escape from work-a-day drudgery.

Georgia seceded on January 19, 1861 and George Dent “... *took to war*” the Glynn Guards, now designated as Company ‘A’, 26th Georgia Infantry. Though designated as infantry the company served as artillery in the defense of the Georgia coast.

The enlistments of the men of the 26th Georgia Infantry expired in the spring of 1862. The entire command promptly reenlisted as Company ‘B’, 4th Georgia Cavalry. George lost the ensuing election for Captain of the new company to William Miles Hazzard. Using his extensive connections George received an appointment as Captain of Company D‘D’, 1st Battalion, Georgia Sharpshooters based in Savannah. He spent the remainder of the war with this unit.

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George Dent and the men of the 1st Battalion first entered active combat in October 1862, marching 17 miles from their encampment at Camp Anderson, near Savannah, to Fort McAllister on the Ogeechee River to repel a Federal naval raid on the fort. They would retrace this march seven times over the next six months. While casualties from these raids were not severe, as at bloodbaths like Antietam or Franklin, men died and received terrible wounds. George and the 1st Battalion fired on an armed foe and received return fire from that foe. The fear and stress inflicted on these men was very real and lasting.

In May 1863 the men of the 1st Battalion “*took to the cars*” of the Savannah and Gulf Railroad for the long trip to Mississippi in an ultimately futile attempt to break General U.S. Grant’s siege of Vicksburg, MS. Too late to raise the siege Confederate General Joseph Johnston soon found his army under siege in Jackson, MS., after the fall of Vicksburg on July 4th. On July 13th during a locally hot probe of the Confederate trenches, George Dent suffered a wound that afflicted him for the remainder of his life, wounded “*severely in [the] elbow, [suffering] a compound fracture.*” The fight was a severe one for “*two other balls... [struck him] but did not penetrate his clothing.*”

Evacuated and placed on convalescent leave George took the train to Tuscaloosa, Al., recuperating at his uncle Dennis Dent’s plantation. He was seriously ill from a post-operative infection. Family legend records that his faithful servant Jack nursed him until the danger passed.

George officially returned to duty on November 1, 1863. His son James says that: “*He returned to the army of Gen’l Bragg before Chattanooga & was present at the battle of Missionary Ridge [November 25, 1863].*” George and the 1st Georgia dug in at the far eastern end of the Confederate line on Missionary Ridge did not actively participate in the battle and probably didn’t witness the Federal breakthrough in the center of the Confederate line. The reports on the 1st Georgia are vague, but undoubtedly Confederate General Patrick Cleburne used the 1st Georgia to assist in preventing the Confederate rout from becoming an annihilation as the Confederate Army retreated into northern Georgia. While not actively engaged in the battle, the battalion took fire and suffered casualties in the action and retreat.

In winter quarters after the ignominious rout at Missionary Ridge George sought a transfer to less strenuous and hazardous duties, citing the pain of his injuries and his inability to use his hand (the scant medical records do not state which arm received the injury). His request granted—he never returned to combat.

George served as assistant inspector of artillery in Savannah and later as commander of the Red Bluff Battery, SC, in the extensive defensive ring around Savannah. Details about George’s whereabouts in late 1864 and early 1865 are difficult to pin down due to the sketchy records that survived the chaos of the Confederacy’s defeat. When George left Red Bluff is not known. At some point he received orders to return to the 1st Battalion, the Morning Report lists him as present in Tupelo, MS., on January 25, 1865 when the survivors of the Battalion straggled in after the bloody twin disasters at Franklin and Nashville, TN.

but by early 1864 he’d had enough. Each man has a limit, a point where, as a lyricist wrote: “*that’s all there is and there ain’t no more!*”

The remnants of the Battalion received orders for transfer to the Carolina's for the dying struggles of the rebellion, but George was not with them. It is not known if he deserted or he received orders for temporary duty with General Samuel Brown in Tallahassee, FL. But when General Brown surrendered at Thomasville, GA., George was with him. Federal records show that George surrendered May 23, 1865 and received a parole the same day.

Perhaps George did desert, many others did as well. He likely suffered terribly from what is now known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Family legend states that his death, at 62, was the result of his war injuries. According to his granddaughter Ophelia, though her grandfather survived the war he was "...a broken man." George believed it was his duty to serve his country in the war but, George's commitment was 'lukewarm' at best, his heart was not in it, as James later wrote: "*My father ... did not like the institution of slavery **He did not take a hopeful view of the war of secession.***" George began and ended his military service as a 'company grade' officer, a captain. Many contemporaries began military service as privates and became generals commanding divisions, brigades, and armies. George Dent was no coward, he'd proved that in combat, he'd faced the "*elephant*" squarely and suffered for it.



The Kepi worn by Captain George C. Dent, Glynn Guards 1861. The cap's red color denotes that the unit is an artillery company and the gold braid indicate that George is a 'company grade' officer. Author photo.

