



Photo by Bill Giles

Volume # 26

Winter 2026

Friends of Hofwyl–Broadfield Plantation Newsletter

Visiting and Programming

The historic site is open Tuesday-Sunday with the tour of the historic house beginning on the hour. If you have any questions about visiting, please call the office staff at 912-264-7333. This park is maintained by the state of Georgia. Bill Giles, Site Manager, can be reached at bill.giles@dnr.ga.gov.

Date	Program	Time
December 31/Jan 1st	New Year's Eve Celebration	10:30pm– 12:30 am
January 1– February 28, 2026	Camellia Celebration	
	(daily when the park is open	
February 8, 2026	Super Museum Sunday	9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
February 8, 2026	Gullah-Geechee Ring Shouters	2:00 - 3:00 p. m.
March 21, 2026	Plein Air Artists Painting	9:00a.m.-2:00 p.m.



**The Ophelia Classic Car Show last Fall 2025 was spectacular
The prize winners were:**

1st Place - Joe O'Quinn with his 1972 Ford F100

2nd Place - Bob Schmitt with his 1956 Chevrolet Corvette

3rd Place - Nancy Winkler with her 1969 Plymouth Road Runner

Friends of Hofwyl Favorite - Lin Orange with his 1957 Chevrolet Suburban

Bill Hill Memorial (Woman Owned) - Shirley Wallace White with her 1966 Ford Ranchero

Best Chevrolet - Frankie Waye Sr with his 1987 Chevrolet Camaro

Best Classic - Jack Gore with his 1955 Packard Patrician

Best Dodge - Teisha Looper with her 1963 Dodge Dart Wagon

Best Ford - Buddy Howe with his 1964 Ford Galaxie

Best Hot Rod - Lance Brown Jr with his 1930 Essex Super 6

Best Oldsmobile - Clark Stewart with his 1971 Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme

Best Pontiac - Tom Gore with his 1966 Pontiac GTO

Best Truck - Eddie Holbrook with his 1954 Chevy 3100

People's Choice - Mike Brown with his 1940 Chevy Master Deluxe Classic

Thanks to all the participants for coming out, and thanks to the Classic Coastal Cruisers Car Club for their help with the show.



New Year's Eve Celebration at the Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation

Ring in the New Year beneath the live oaks and stars!

Welcome to Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation, where history, heritage, and celebration come together under the stars!

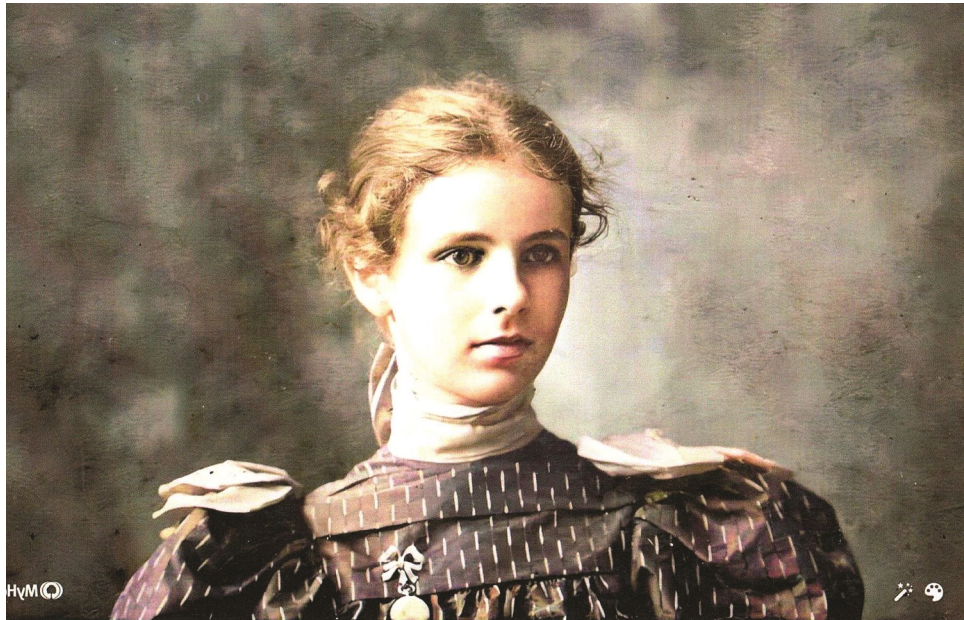
At 10:30 p.m. you'll take a torch lit journey through America's early days, walking in the footsteps of patriots, sailors, and the families whose stories shaped our nation. Along the way, you'll visit three storytelling stops, each sharing a fascinating glimpse into the past—illuminated by people who lived right here on this historic coastal plantation.

By 11:30 p.m. we'll gather to welcome 2026 in true Hofwyl style with the ringing of the historic plantation bell, singing Auld Lang Syne, and a toast (non-alcoholic cider, of course) accompanied by cookies and cheer.

After midnight there will be a late night tour of the house.

You must preregister for this event. Fee is \$15 per person any age.

**The 1st Annual Camellia Celebration
January –February 2026
Daily When the Park is Open**



Miriam Dent: Camellia Gardener

This lovely lady was the gardener at Hofwyl-Broadfield that worked to hybridize camellias. She was successful with two Camellia trees that are found only at Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation and registered with the American Camellia Society.

Miriam Gratz Cohen Dent was the elder sister of Ophelia Dent and the true managerial force behind Hofwyl during the first half of the twentieth century. While Ophelia is often remembered for her storytelling and dramatic personality, contemporary recollections make clear that Miriam was “the dynamic one” and “the brains” of Hofwyl.

Born into the Dent–Cohen family and educated at Rosemary Hall in Connecticut, Miriam formed enduring friendships with her northern classmates, several of whom spent extended visits at Hofwyl. Those who knew her remembered a woman of deep feeling, sharp intelligence, and strong convictions—particularly regarding the struggles and discrimination faced by Jewish people, which she took “deeply and personally”.

Though less socially inclined than her sister, Miriam possessed a romantic sensibility. She loved music, storytelling, and domestic refinement. But perhaps nothing expressed her personality more than her passion for gardening. Miriam was a devoted and imaginative gardener, known for enhancing Ophelia’s orderly vegetable beds by planting flowers in the spaces between the rows, creating a landscape that blended utility with beauty.

Her greatest loves were camellias and seasonal blooms. One witness recalled that Miriam was “crazy about camellias,” and later two varieties of camellias were named for the sisters—the “Ophelia” and the “Misses Dent” camellias—honoring their shared legacy but especially Miriam’s botanical creativity. In springtime, her garden burst into “a profusion of bloom—poppies... daisies... larkspur... bachelor buttons... roses... and masses of carnations”.

Miriam’s death in 1953 devastated Ophelia, who relied on her sister’s judgment, strength, and steady leadership. Yet Miriam’s imprint on Hofwyl remains visible in the gardens she shaped, the surviving camellias she cultivated, and the memories of those who saw her as the quiet but commanding heart of the Dent household.

Bill Giles

Historic Site Manager | Park Ranger



The Ophelia Camellia Hybridized by Miriam

We have 70 trees in 3 areas. If you want to see the trees, just ask the staff for a Camellia map. Daily in the park during January and February the staff will hang a ball in the Camellia trees for our visitors to find. If you find the ball, remove it, and turn it in at the office to get a little gift to remember your day among the beautiful Camellias at Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation. Come out, bring a friend and discover the gift to us from a gardener in the last century.

Celebrating Camellias In Bloom

Scheduled Activities:

January 3, 2026 ppt at 10 a.m. (adults) Debra Stockton

January 17, 2026 Camellia Waxing (adults) at 2 p.m. Linda Hlozansky

January 24, 2026 Notecard crafting at 2 p.m. Diane Closs

January 31, 2026 Advanced Camellia ppt produced by Lisa Klein, Gwinnett County Ext Agent for Master Gardeners and serious Camellia Gardeners (adults)

February 7, 2026 Children's Scavenger Hunt and Crafts Sandy Colhard

February 14, 2026 Adult/Child Tea Party tour of house at 2 p.m. and tea at 3 p.m. in cooks house. The participants will register ahead of time with maximum of 12.

February 28, 2026 ppt on Hybridizing and Cloning and the Franklin Camellia- (adults) Patty Mallicote



Gullah-Geechee Ring Shouters

We are very pleased to welcome the Gullah-Geechee Ring Shouters back to Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation.

They will perform traditional Gullah- Geechee songs and dance.

The performance will be on Sunday February 8, 2026 at 2p.m.

Come out to enjoy their educational and entertaining program.



On Super Museum Sunday all state parks are open free of charge



**Plein Air Artists
Enjoy Painting at Hofwyl-Broadfield
Save the Date!
March 21, 2026**



**For information and to register call George Netherton at 678-778-8889
or email him at gnethton@me.com**

Rice Birds

By

S.T. Lanter

Farming is a profession of hope.



Rice Bird or Bobolink, *Dolichonyx oryzivora*. The Library of Congress.

My father was a rice planter, and lived on Broughton Island, McIntosh County, Georgia. He owned the greater part of it, the rest belonging to my cousin, Robert Troup, whose property [New Hope] mostly lay on the mainland, where his sisters also had large estates.¹ Their home place was called "Broadfield." All along the Altamaha River were large plantations where the [rice] planters lived in winter (no white man being able to stay at night in summer on a rice field), the Grants, Coopers and Dents being among the most prominent.²

Georgia Bryant Conrad speaks truth in her 1901 article, stating what to her was obvious, the importance of rice. Her father was a rice planter and so were her relatives and neighbors. In the ante-bellum years through the South ‘King Cotton’ was the source of wealth, prestige, and status. But in coastal Georgia “King Cotton” was swept aside by an ancient and venerable cash crop: Rice. The rice cultivated at ‘Broadfield’ was a strain known as “Carolina Gold.” A strain introduced from Madagascar prior to 1686 by a Captain John Thurber. In the ante bellum years, Broadfield Rice’ garnered the highest prices at the Charleston markets and became the ‘gold standard’ by which all other plantation rice crops were judged.

The low-lying coastal areas of Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina, south of the Cape Fear River, were ideal rice growing areas. Cultivating rice requires fertile soil, sun, abundant water, and labor. Rice planting was back-breaking, muddy, and intensely physical work. *In 1860, the total crop of rice in the United States was 5,000,000 bushels and of that amount South Carolina produced 3,500,00 bushels, North Carolina, and Georgia the rest.* ³

Farming, especially rice farming, is laced with hazards—natural and man-made. To bring a crop to market, planters fought the water-weevil which destroys the heart of the leaf, the ugly, black rice worm who feasts on young, tender shoots by drowning them with water. To the time immemorial hazards of drought, storm, flood, war, falling prices, was added one more threat--Rice-Birds.

These small birds, winter in the South American countries of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, and Paraguay. Migrating to North America in early spring, usually arriving in Georgia in mid-May. They migrate in large flocks and have been known to fly as much as 1,100 miles in a single day. The birds are from 6.3 inches to 7.1 inches in length and weigh 1 ounce. They nest on the ground, and the male may mate with several females.

[Known as the] Bobolink in the North, Reed-bird along the Eastern shore (sic), the Barley-bird in South America, and the May-bird on our Georgia coast in May, turns into the Rice-bird on this same coast in late August. ⁴

James and Mamie Dent worked hard and fought hard to make a life and retain possession of Hofwyl. The post-bellum years of trial. To them it must have seemed that nature did her best to destroy what the Dents sought to build. First came the great storm of 1898 and then Rice Birds or Bobolinks swooped in to claim the rice crop. Daughter Miriam told T. Gilbert Pearson in an undated interview, that on August 22, 1906 the rice birds invaded the rice fields of Hofwyl and the hungry migratory birds all but destroyed the rice crop. *Rice-birds reach Hofwyl every year in August. It was the habit of the Rice-bird to reach the Georgia coast almost on the same date, August 20th, year after year.* ⁵ At Hofwyl rice was planted from: March 15 to April 15, May 1 to May 10 and for ten Days in June. ⁶

Miriam writing almost 30 years after the last Hofwyl rice crop perhaps oversimplifies the seriousness of the avian invasion. More than one flock of hungry migrants visited Hofwyl each year, on both annual migrations. The first flock, known as May Birds, arrived from their winter habitat in South America stayed but a short time.

The May birds would not remain in the rice fields longer than two weeks, but during that time they were capable of destroying a great deal of rice, and this could be prevented only by planting not later than the tenth of April. ⁷

To beat the Rice Birds planters sometimes varied the month of planting. "Rice planted in early June escaped both the May Birds and the Rice Birds..." but there was a trade-off, for rice planted in June did not produce the same yield per acre as rice planted earlier in the year—and planters were careful not to plant more than one-fifth of the crop in June.

The first birds, pale yellow and black, turning brown later, were easy to cope with by boys and girls who kept them on the move by beating tin pans, continuous shouting, walking back and forth on the banks; but when they arrived in volume men with guns were needed. They stood on scaffolds in the middle of the field and shot incessantly from sun-up to Sun-down. The birds had to be kept in motion for they lit again almost as soon as they had risen. It was called "Shoot and Holler." They daily used up one keg of powder and often two and while they killed in a day many hundreds of birds, four or five dozen at a shot and sometimes ten, there were thousands more pouring into the fields and inflicting untold damage. ⁸

The Rice Birds returning southbound in late summer were even more destructive to the maturing rice crop. For in late August the: *Rice was tender, in "The Milk," or half-green, they sucked [emphasis in original] it swiftly, and, later, when cut, tied in sheaves, and stacked, the grain was hard and they had to Shell it, but the loss was just as great.* ⁹

Timing of planting was crucial. *Owing to an unavoidable delay my father was two weeks late in getting his rice planted out there on the island tract. It came 'into the milk' ¹⁰ late in August. Father employed fifty men and boys from daylight until dark every day for two weeks in an effort to save his crop. These gunners fired more than 11,000 shotgun cartridges, besides using quantities of black powder and shot in muskets, and other muzzle loading guns.* ¹¹

The effort was in vain because of the rice bird's enormous numbers even though the gunners constantly fired into the vast swarm: *usually bringing down two or three dozen birds at discharge. [There was always many more untouched and when the] birds would rise from great areas of the field ... we could hear the roar of their wings here at the house a mile away.*¹²

The crop that year showed great promise, and had the crop been brought in *[it] would have averaged sixty bushels to the acre over the 200-acre tract. That would have meant 12,000 bushels or 480,000 pounds, worth six cents a pound. ...if harvested [it] would have been worth \$28,800.*¹³ *Despite the fifty men and boys with guns, the rice birds were so persistent, and so destructive, that father did not get one pound of rice from that field.*¹⁴

Some of this loss was covered by crop insurance and the other rice fields of 'Upper and Lower Broadfield and Hofwyl were spared the depredations of the Rice Birds. The sixty bushels to the acre that Miriam mentions seems high, perhaps a bit of a fish story, but even if all of these speculations are fact, the losses caused by the birds were still substantial. *...Sometimes [the crop] was so completely destroyed that nothing but chaff was left and it was not even cut for straw.*¹⁵

But as a learned sage observed "it's an ill wind indeed that doesn't blow someone some good." *At the end of the day the birds were enjoyed by all who could get them. ...no butter was used in cooking, their own fat being all that was needed, with plenty left for gravy. Broiling was best in with little salt and even less pepper.... They had a rich and delicate flavor... [were so small] the feeblest could consume a half dozen, a man thought nothing of a dozen and a half.... The colored field hands built fires on the rice banks and in iron pots or in their tin dinner pails cooked rice, meanwhile dressing birds and dropping them in to make a Pilau [rice pilaf] for their noon-day meal. The fat was so rich it would "wink" in the pot, to quote an old colored friend*¹⁶

The Rice Bird became for the Dent's a metaphor for the passing of the Rice Culture, a wistful regret and longing for a now vanished way of life.

*It is as the very delicious Rice-bird that he is best known here, and because all rice-planting on a large scale has vanished from these parts, he, too, has vanished, and it is doubtful whether any of the younger generation has had, or ever will have the pleasure of tasting this small fat and juicy morsel.*¹⁷

*A lady from Virginia once asked me why I planted a crop which birds could destroy, and my only defense was that if she had ever seen rice growing, or had eaten rice birds, she would understand.*¹⁸

Bibliography

¹Robert along with his sisters Matilda (Maude), and Clelia (also spelled Celia) each inherited a 1/3 interest in Broadfield. His sister Ophelia Troup Dent inherited part of New Hope plantation which her husband George Dent named 'Hofwyl.'

²Conrad, Georgia Bryan, *Reminiscences of a Southern Woman, Southern Workman Feb. 1901, p. 77.*

³Contributions From the Charleston Museum, edited by E. Milby Burton Director, quoting from an undated speech given before The Carolina Plantation Society, by Theodore D. Ravenel, "*The Last Days of Rice Planting*," p. 43. In this case 1,166,000 bushels of rice.

⁴Dent, Miriam, *The Rice-Bird in this Section*, unpublished manuscript, Dent Collection, Hofwyl-Broadfield State Historic Site, February 24, 1941, p. 1.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶*Ibid.*, p.1.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp 1-2.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰ Rice comes 'into the milk' as the kernels of rice begin to form. In the first stage of this process a milky white substance forms where the kernels will be.

¹¹Gilbert T. Pearson, "Birds of an Old Rice Field," *The North American Review*, 322. The "unavoidable delay" Miriam speaks of was that James couldn't hire enough local laborers for planting. 1906 was the year he experimented with using Japanese laborers.

¹²Dent, Miriam, *The Rice-Bird in this Section*, unpublished manuscript, Dent Collection, Hofwyl-Broadfield State Historic Site, February 24, 1941.

¹³Estimated to be worth \$767,511 in 2024.

¹⁴Dent, Miriam, *The Rice-Bird in this Section*, unpublished manuscript, Dent Collection, Hofwyl-Broadfield State Historic Site, February 24, 1941, p. 2.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁸Heyward, Duncan Clinch, Seed from Madagascar, pp.32-33.