



Volume #15

Spring 2023

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
March 7th-April 9th	Easter Egg Scavenger Hunt	9 a.m.-4 p.m. daily (when the park is open)

April 16th	The Jewish Connection to Hofwyl-Broadfield	3:30 p.m.
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Plein Air Art Show will be on display:

May - Horton Gallery, Southeast Georgia Healthcare Brunswick Campus

June and July - McIntosh Art Museum

August - Saint Simons Island Welcome Center

September– Hofwyl -Broadfield Auditorium

Easter Egg Scavenger Hunt

Be sure to get out to the park by April 9th to enjoy the 2023 Fun for the whole family. The hunt is on daily when the park is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. This fun game features a map and clues to complete the secret phrase or word. There are prizes for turning in your completed map with the correct solution. Call the office for more information.

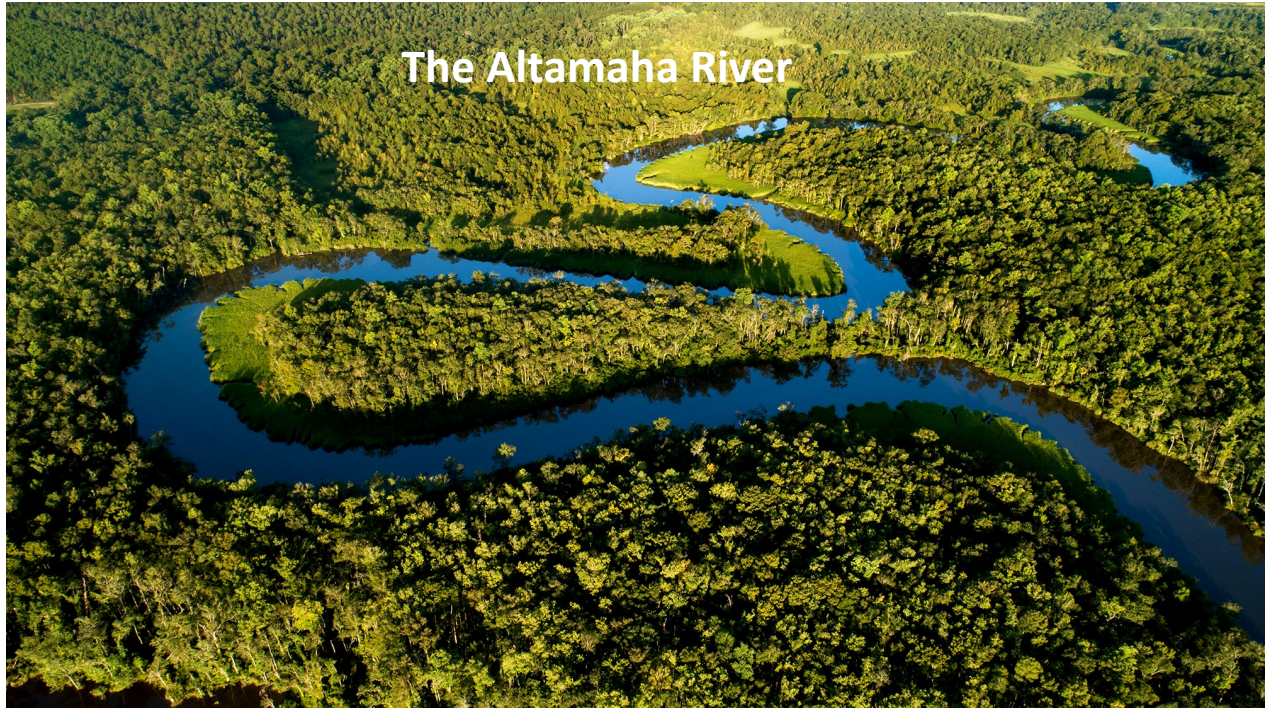


The Jewish Connection

Join us on April 16th at 3:30 p.m. for a presentation at the Hofwyl–Broadfield Auditorium by Mason Stewart, Friend of Hofwyl–Broadfield Plantation.

Miriam Cohen of Savannah married James T. Dent of Hofwyl–Broadfield Plantation bringing the traditions of her religion to their home. Mr. Stewart will share with us the interesting story of the family's blend of religions.





The Altamaha is 137 miles of unspoiled river to canoe, fish, and camp. Come by the office at Hofwyl-Broadfield and pick up a map / guide to begin planning your adventure this Spring.

- **The Altamaha River is the longest river in Georgia**
- **The river was named for a Yamassee Indian Chief**
- **Lumber was floated down river from the vast forests to the saw mills along the coast.**
- **Steamboats traveled up and down the river carrying travelers and goods**
- **Unbridled by dams, this free-flowing waterway is home to a broad range of animals including rare fresh-water mussels**
- **The river holds an abundance of freshwater fish species such as American Shad, Striped Bass, Sturgeon, American Eel, Bullhead, Channel Catfish, White Catfish, Crappie, Largemouth Bass, and many others**
- **The Altamaha is a paradise for photographers, birders, fishermen, and naturalists**

How Did They Go to Charleston?

By

S.T. Lanter



Figure 1 An 1864 Map of Glynn County, GA., and the Altamaha River estuary (upper right). Library of Congress.

The Altamaha River, the largest river in Georgia, flows eastward 137 miles from its origin at the confluence of the Oconee and Ocmulgee Rivers to the union with the Atlantic Ocean near Brunswick. Including the major tributary, the Ocmulgee, its 470 mile length ranks it as the seventh longest river system located entirely within one state. The river system drains about 14,000 square miles, with a water flow of 14,518 cubic feet of water per second. The Altamaha's brackish estuary, where fresh and saltwater mix, covers 26 square miles and qualifies it as the third largest contributor of fresh water to the Atlantic Ocean in North America.

The river like a con artist has had many names: A-lot-amaha, Alatahama, Alatomaha, Allamah, Frederica River, Rio Al Tama, Rio de Talaje, and Talaxe River. One version of its christening has it: *In the later 17th century, a group of Yamasee Indians under Chief Altamaha*

(a variation has his name is Altama) *took up residence near the mouth of the Altamaha...*[and] that the river's name comes from this Yamasee chief's name. Another variant is that the Altamaha's name comes from the Yamasee word meaning Altama's village or place.

The Altamaha River when compared to the Mississippi, the Nile or the Amazon pales in to insignificance, but without it there would have been no highway for people and goods in the early history of Georgia.

William Brailsford, eschewing his father's dirty business of slave trading purchased Broughton Island (the upside down shoe pictured on the 1864 map; upper right corner) circa 1802 to become a respectable rice planter. The swampy narrow coastal strip from approximately Charleston, S.C. south to St. Mary, Ga. was ideal for raising rice, introduced from Madagascar in the early 18th Century.

The banks along the coastal Altamaha River basin were perfect for rice production, but like coins this paradise had another evil side—malaria and yellow fever. Carried from Africa in the 'cargo' holds of arriving slave ships and unleashed onto people with no experience/ resistance to these diseases and endemic to this region by 1800. Aware of the health danger the wealthy planters left their plantations during the hot growing season when the risk was greatest. William Brailsford was no exception. Leaving orders with his white overseer, young men on the make willing to risk everything for a stake, Brailsford gave the overseer his orders for the season and rapidly departed to the more healthful climate in Charleston.

Roads of the era were mere tracks or non-existent, primeval game travels unsuited for wheeled transport. In her unpublished 1904 narrative Ophelia Troup Dent asks the question: *How did they go to Charleston?* She answered: *In an eightoared [sic] rowboat, with a small cabin.*

The Altamaha was the transportation highway of 18th and 19th centuries, but it could also be an easy route for foreign invaders. During the War of 1812, the fight that historians have dubbed as the war that made America, Britain's Royal Navy stationed warships along the east coast to prevent movement of goods, troops and to strangle the American economy. Normally this blockade was desultory and rather benign, more inconvenience than combat. However, Admiral George Cockburn (pronounced Co-burn) an aggressive commander pushed the policy of 'drubbing the Americans' when and where it was possible, launching his 'Banditti' on nuisance raids along the Altamaha Delta.

And as the *Savannah Republican* duly reported Cockburn's Banditti raided Broadfield Plantation:

A SKETCH OF BRITISH PLUNDER!

Mrs. [Maria] Brailsford's (William's widow) house [was] broken open and robbed by a boats crew under command of lieutenant Grant—some of Mrs. Brailsford's and Mrs. [Camilla Brailsford] Troup's cloths (clothing) were [plundered by the raiders]....

Despite British depredations on the Rice Country within easy reach of their ships, life went on, especially for a well-known physician. Until Thomas Spalding summoned Dr. James Troup to attend a sick person on Sapelo Island. Dr. Troup had to cross Sapelo Sound a body of water patrolled by the Royal Navy. Of that trip was born a family legend as his daughter, Ophelia, duly records:

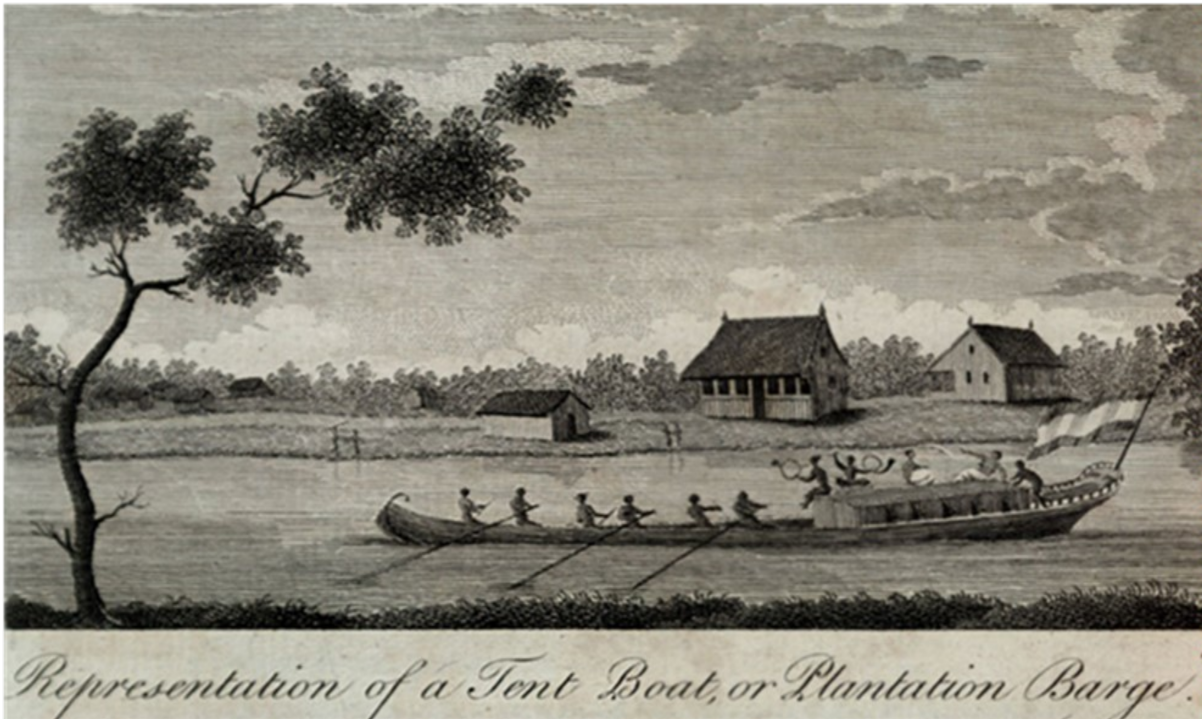


Figure 2 Ophelia, in her narrative, is probably referring to a boat similar to this one, a Plantation Barge or Tent Boat.

Source: John Gabriel Stedman., *Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition, against the revolted Negroes of Surinam ... from the year 1772, to 1777* (London, 1796), vol. 1.

In an illness in Mr. Spalding's family my father was sent for in a row boat [sic] to Darien. He was overhauled and taken on one of the [British] fleet[s] [frigates]. While on deck he recognized a small vessel (most probably a 'flat' bottomed barge) from Broadfield, with rice, trying to run the blockade to Florida (then Spanish territory). He waived them back with his handkerchief; it was not noticed,

neither was he detained. Major Wood, a friend, who was with him for his own pleasure, pled with my father to call him "Mr. Wood" for his safety. For a little while he remembered, but soon the "Major" was spoken, and instantly withdrawn, not before the officers were on the alert, thinking they had a prize. The doctor could go, but Mr. Wood could not. After some expostulation both were allowed to proceed.

Broadfield is only six or seven miles from Darien but until 1914 no bridge or even a real road, crossed the numerous waterways between them. The only way to travel from Darien to Brunswick was by boat. The rice planters kept numerous boats for their use. Regattas involving the boats, rowed by plantation slaves were common and eagerly anticipated social events each year. In 1879 the *Brunswick Advertiser*, in the May 10 issue, reports that for the upcoming County Fair:

Messrs. James M. Couper, J.T. Collins and James T. Dent constitute the Regatta Committee [and] couldn't be better.... [the regatta will be grand] ...six boats have already accepted, positively, and ten more are considering the position.

Building boats for practical reasons morphed into having the fanciest and the fastest boats, to having competitions to establish bragging rights. Originally slaves built these boats from aged, hollowed-out cypress logs that were 25 to 50 feet long and propelled by 12-foot-long oars mounted on an outrigger. The slave crew sang chanties as they rowed to keep in sync with each other.

The only way, of course, that we could move about, was by boat.... These were made by the planters themselves, with the help of their slaves.... The Negro men rowed us back and forth to Darien, and we never had less than six or eight, as the boats were large and heavy. Sometimes it would take two or three to hold us, with our luggage and attendants. On those occasions the Negroes always sang to us, keeping time with their oars. These trips were always looked forward to with the greatest pleasure, and when we reached our destination, it was with regret that we were lifted out.

The regattas were times of great excitement, fun, good food, spirited competition, and socialization sometimes conducted entirely on the waters of the Altamaha, fondly remembered years later:

There was the greatest rivalry between our neighbors and ourselves as to who could make the fastest race-boat. They were run against each other, at what we called regattas. When these last took place, large parties would come from the surrounding neighborhood to witness the race, and Savannah and Charleston were always well represented. In the last race I remember, my father's boat,

"Ethyl Newcome", ran against Mr. Cooper's "Sunny South". These boats were so long that twelve Negroes rowed them, the master in each case steering. Mr. Cooper, I think, won at that time. The entertainments given at these races took place sometimes in flats, which were boats as large as a room, in which the rice was carried to the barnyard. Tables were spread under large awnings, and every delicacy was provided. These were easily attainable, as oysters, canvass-back ducks, terrapin, mutton, beef, and even our own oranges and lemons were there for the killing or gathering.



Figure 3 James Troup Dent ca. 1895, looking very sure of himself on board one of his boats. Possibly the yacht 'Claude' that he refurbished in 1893. Travel from and to Hofwyl was still dependent on boats. Courtesy of: Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation State Historic Site.

George Dent and his son James were inveterate tinkerers. George once designing and building his own steam powered launch. But the good life didn't last forever. 'Broadfield Rice' was less and less profitable after the Civil War. Bad luck with hurricanes, damage inflicted by the invasion of 'Rice Birds,' higher labor costs, competition from the faster growing, more productive strain of rice introduced from Japan all contributed to the fall of the Rice Kingdom. With James' death from pneumonia in 1913 rice planting was at an end. James' widow Miriam and son Gratz were left to pick up the pieces. They foreswore rice planting and converted Hofwyl to a dairy farm, not as lucrative as before but enough to retain possession of the land. Expenses were curtailed. In early spring 1912 Gratz sold one of the family's boats:

For Sale—31-foot open launch, 8 ft. 4 in. beam, 10 h.p. Eagle, 2-cylinder engine, large, roomy, strongly built boat. An exceptional bargain for \$300 cash.

Paved roads and the automobile would soon make travel by water obsolete. US Route 17 would follow the track right-of-way of the defunct Georgia Coast & Piedmont Railroad. Brunswick merchants would buy up the GCP right-of-way and convert it to a 'shell road' paved with shells in the early 1920's. Asphalt paving followed in the 1930's. It was the end of an era, echoing the bitter lament of Oliver Goldsmith's 1770 poem, *The Deserted Village: Ah, no. To distant climes, a dreary scene...they go [to] Where the Altama[ha] murmurs to their woe.*

Dent, Ophelia Troup, *Memoirs of Ophelia Troup Dent Laurens County August 6, 1902*, 6. Hereafter cited as, *Memoirs*.

Ibid, 6.

Savannah [GA] Republican, Saturday Evening, May 13, 1815

Dent, Ophelia Troup, *Memoirs*, 10.

Conrad, Georgia Bryan, "*Reminiscences of a Southern Woman*," February 1901, 78.

Ibid 78.

Ibid, 78.

Ibid, 78.



Margaret Mitchell of Gone With The Wind fame was good friends with the Dent sisters of Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation. On the following page you will see a letter from John Marsh, Margaret's husband. You will notice that in the letter he referred to Margaret as "Peggy". This letter was penned shortly after Margaret's untimely death in Atlanta.



JOHN R. MARSH

1268 Piedmont Avenue, N. E.
Atlanta 5, Georgia

June 8, 1950

Misses Miriam and Ophelia Dent
Hofwyl Plantation
Brunswick, Georgia

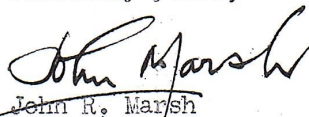
Dear Misses Dent:

When I did not write and thank you for your kind letters last fall, I felt that I could rely upon your understanding. You do not need an explanation from me of the flood of cares and duties that used up my time and strength and left me no opportunity for writing letters to dear friends. But it was comforting to have your messages. The Coast had an especial place in Peggy's affections, and you two were among the small group of dear friends who always came to our minds when we looked forward to trips to Brunswick, or looked back with happy memories upon our visits there. I can say happy memories, in spite of my serious illness there. That did not take away our fondness for your part of the world.

I hope you will like the enclosed issue of the Atlanta Historical Bulletin. Peggy's father was one of the founders of the Historical Society, and she took an active part in its work, so I know she would have felt honored in having one of the issues of the Bulletin devoted to her.

My best wishes to you both, and I hope that we may meet again. I am coming back to Brunswick for another visit, when I get the opportunity.

Sincerely yours,


John R. Marsh