



Friends of Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation Newsletter

Volume #8

912-264-7333

Summer 2021

Diamond rings and broken lamps

The Last Will and Testament of

The Grand Lady of Hofwyl

By Mason Stewart

“I wish a plain gray wooden casket, or a plain, gray cloth covered casket...” Thus began the last Will and Testament of one of the wealthiest women in Glynn County.

It continued, “After services at Hofwyl-Plantation conducted by the Rabbi from Brunswick and the Rector of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, I desire to be buried next to my father in Laurel Grove Cemetery, Savannah.”

And so it was that shortly after 8:00 a.m. on September 5th, 1973, while sipping her morning coffee, Miss Ophelia Troup Dent quietly passed away. Before they took her away, it is said that her dear friend and beloved butler, Rudolf Capers, carefully set out a full place setting of her finest china and silver one last time “for Miss Ophelia, the Grand Lady of Hofwyl.”

The Grand Lady of Hofwyl was the last surviving heir of a 1200-acre family estate situated on the south branch of the Altamaha river. Her passing closed the book on one family’s 167-year saga of life on a river plantation in Coastal Georgia that spanned five generations from 1806 to 1973. A saga of wealth, power, struggle, and survival not unlike a more famous book written by Miss Ophelia’s good friend, Margaret Mitchel, with two exceptions:

1) Unlike “*Gone With The Wind*”, Miss Ophelia’s family story was true and

2) unlike Scarlett, rather than “I’ll think about that tomorrow”, Miss Ophelia provided specific detailed plans for her beloved Hofwyl following that fateful day when there would be no more tomorrows.

What follows are some specifics of those detailed plans excerpted from the Last Will and Testament of Miss Ophelia Troup Dent, the last remaining heir and Grand Lady of Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation.

After the appropriate legalese appointing The First National Bank of Brunswick and Albert Fendig Sr. as co-executors, Albert Fendig Jr. as the designated backup, and the payment of appropriate expenses, the seventeen-page neatly typed will carefully lays out an extremely detailed list of specific bequests.

The bequests began with a list of 28 specific monetary bequests totaling just under \$200,000.00 that Miss Ophelia left to individuals. The names of the recipients span the spectrum from the well-known to the unknown, from rich to poor, from young to old, and from black to white. The one common denominator for the bequeathals seems to have been that she considered them all “dear friends”.

The specific amounts left to named individuals varied greatly, ranging from \$30,000.00 to \$600.00, indicating the care and time taken with each personal largesse.

She then left another \$16,000.00 to her favorite charities and civic organizations, including: The humane societies of both Brunswick and Savannah, a seeing-eye dog organization in Morristown, PA, The Telfair Academy of Arts and Science in Savannah, Laurel Grove Cemetery for the maintenance of her family’s plot, and of course to a favorite cause near and dear to Ophelia’s heart: Boys Estate. She also left \$1,000.00 to the Abrams Home for Old Women in Savannah “in memory of my old nurse, Ellen Connor”.

Miss Ophelia seems to have taken the time to remember not only her family and close friends, but also some of Hofwyl’s formerly enslaved workers still living nearby with whom she maintained a special relationship. Approximately \$20,000.00 was designated to be distributed to several African American families living in the nearby Glynn and McIntosh county communities of Petersville, Needwood, and Ridgeville.

Once the monetary gifts were listed and accounted for, Miss Ophelia turned her attention to the distribution of selected personal items and artifacts that she wished distributed to 22 carefully selected friends and acquaintances. As with her monetary gifts, it is clear that she gave careful thought to both the individuals listed as well as

the specific items chosen for distribution.

While many of the items detailed for bequeathal were obviously quite rare and valuable, monetary value did not appear to be much of a consideration in her selections. Instead, many of her choices of gifts to individuals were often based keeping ownership of heirlooms within the family. For example, Miss Ophelia desired that the “portrait of great, great, great grandmother Mrs. Samuel Brailsford” painted by Jeremiah Theus be left to a relative in Savannah. However, Ophelia then requested: “If she will do so, I would like her to leave it at Hofwyl in her name as the Brailsfords were the original owners, but I leave this decision strictly up to her.” In another example, Ophelia left multiple pieces of tableware, “all Brailsford silver marked with crest” to another relative in Philadelphia, but with the same request “for him to leave at Hofwyl in his name.” Other close family members were left the miniature painting of “great aunt Hannah Troup Morris”, the large mahogany sideboard, originally belonging to Rebecca Gratz, and a miniature painting of “great, great, great uncle” David Moses, painted by Edward Green Malbone.

A diamond and emerald ring given to her by Mrs. Pierre S. Dupont was left to Mrs. Dupont’s niece, and a rare set of books written by the great philosopher Rousseau--given to her by the grandson of Thomas Spaulding (one of the most influential figures in antebellum Georgia) --was bequeathed to a blue-blood Georgian family friend in Savannah.

On the other hand, many other gifts in Miss Ophelia’s will were clearly based on some unexplained personal connection. For instance, she left three “old glass bedside lamps, ...one broken from its base... and an old lantern on back porch” to one legatee in Pennsylvania,

while another was bequeathed a “little blue bird pin” and a “little vase in shape of swan.”

Finally, and more traditionally, much of her personal jewelry consisting of necklaces, pins, and wristwatches, as well as several of her 12-gauge shotguns, plus her 1972 Oldsmobile were left to various other close friends and relatives.

Miss Ophelia then mentioned several of her [very wealthy] dear friends, who “have so many possessions, [that] I do not wish to burden them with more but will be happy if they want anything of mine”.

Next, Miss Ophelia Dent focused her attention on the one great unfinished chore so dear to her heart, the preservation of her beloved Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation as a permanent memorial. To that end the Last Will and Testimony of Ophelia Troup Dent, declared:

“I established a Trust having the name of, The Miss Ophelia Troup Dent revocable Trust, to which I conveyed a portion of Broadfield Plantation...at the time of my death, it is my desire and I direct my Executors to convey two tracts of land for many years known as Hofwyl and Broadfield Plantations... to the Georgia Historical Commission or other agency as set out in said Trust Agreement. ... Said property shall be designated as The Dent and Troup family Memorial and to be held, administered and preserved in a manner fitting to perpetuate the historical significance of said property which has been used since the early 1800’s as a southern plantation...that such real and personal property will be preserved so as to maintain its dignity and tradition and so as to be a suitable memorial to the testatrix’s (Ophelia Dent) family and ancestors. The powers bestowed upon my executors as to the terms of such conveyance is intended to be broad and inclusive and they are

vested with complete discretion in the matter except that I desire they receive assurances that the property not be commercialized.”

Miss Ophelia Dent, then set aside an endowment fund to be used by the trustees for the maintenance and preservation of the conveyed property.

Finally, after finishing her long list of specific bequests and the establishment of the preservation trusts, Miss Ophelia designated that, “after payment of my expenses incidental to my death” ... any “residue and remainder” be distributed between:

The Colored Goodwill home in Brunswick,

Boy’s Estate,

The Bethany Home in Vidalia,

and her new Memorial Trust.

Now, with the will being finished, Miss Ophelia made one final request of her dear friends:

“If any person to whom I have made gifts of furniture does not expect to use same, then they are requested to leave such furniture in the house for the use and benefit of the Hofwyl Plantation memorial.”

Three years later, on a bright autumn morning in September of 1973, The Grand Lady of Hofwyl, quietly slipped her earthly bonds and joined five generations of Georgia history. But, unlike Scarlett, she no longer needed to “Think about that tomorrow”. For, though Miss Ophelia’s Tomorrows were now gone, her beloved Hofwyl would continue on for many years to come.

***** Historic note*****

Miss Ophelia's last wishes regarding her funeral, though large, did not occur exactly as she requested. There were two services, one at Hofwyl and one in Savannah, however, there was no Rabbi present for the morning service at Hofwyl, as she had requested. According to details of Ophelia's funeral services provided in a book on Ophelia's life written by Matt Shaeffer:

"The funeral was at the Plantation Friday morning at 10:00 A.M. Never before had I seen so many people gathered at the Plantation, especially older people. There were several doctors in their 80's and 90's whom I didn't know but who at some time had the honor of knowing Ms. Dent. Among the people there that I knew were Sister Gilbert and her mother, Ann Adams, the McGarvey sisters, Dr. Galin, Sonny Hall, Ed Bunkley, of course Rudolph & about 13 black men who were also loyal to Ms. Dent (grounds keepers...)

Rev. Arthur Cody spoke at the funeral, and all the people stood around in the living room and both front and back porches. Some were outside by the big oak tree to the side of the house. I would estimate that there were between 175 and 200 people present. There were no official pallbearers. The casket was in the hallway when I arrived, near the back porch. After Rev. Cody concluded, several black men [Rudolf Capers and William Polite] took the casket to the hearse."

"The service given by Mr. Cody of St. Marks was beautiful. Afterward, my sisters, Natalie and myself, taking Dr. Galin with us, we drove to Savannah for the interment service at Laurel Grove Cemetery. This was at 3 o'clock, when we saw many of the same faces that had been at Hofwyl in the morning.

This afternoon service was Jewish and the Rabbi, a young man [Rabbi Saul Rubin], gave a very moving service, and the prayers and reading were beautiful both English and Hebrew; particularly the parts in Hebrew were impressive, with grandeur to them.”

*****Additional historical note*****

The Savannah Rabbi mentioned above, Rabbi Saul Rubin, suggests that the author may be mistaken on the number of attendees at the grave-side service in Savannah. He recalls that there were very few people in attendance. He remembers only four ladies from Brunswick.

According to Rabbi Rubin, he was actually unaware of Miss Ophelia’s Jewish roots, or her request for a Rabbi, or her connection to the Savannah Cohen family until he was requested to do the service at Laurel Grove. Also, He was not aware of the impressive and poignant morning service held earlier at Hofwyl until he read a draft of this article.

8



Albert Fendig's Plein Air Art Event produced some beautiful paintings and happy artists.



Photos by Troup Nightingale



**Albert Fendig Art 's Exhibit for 2021 is scheduled for:
May– Horton Gallery, SE Georgia Healthcare Center**



June and July - McIntosh Art Association in Darien



August—Golden Isles Welcome Center, St. Simons Island



September– Hofwyl–Broadfield Historic Site Auditorium



GEORGIA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

STATE PARKS & HISTORIC SITES



**Get outdoors on the Hofwyl-Broadfield Trails
Get Out Get Dirty Get Fit**



**See
Wonderful Wildlife**

On The Trails At



**Hofwyl-Broadfield
Plantation**



**Photos by
Suzette Brumbaugh**



Check Out Our Birds





**The Friends of Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation invite you to
come out and enjoy Summer under the Live Oaks at
Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation.**