



Rudolph Capers Story, page 7

Photo (Hofwyl Archives)

Volume #6

Winter 2020-21

Friends of Hofwyl–Broadfield Plantation Newsletter

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. Tours of the plantation house are available. 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. If you have any questions about visiting this historic site please call the 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.

**Hofwyl–Broadfield
Plantation**
State Historic Site





Friends of Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation

Join the Friends of Hofwyl—Broadfield Plantation

Purpose of the Organization

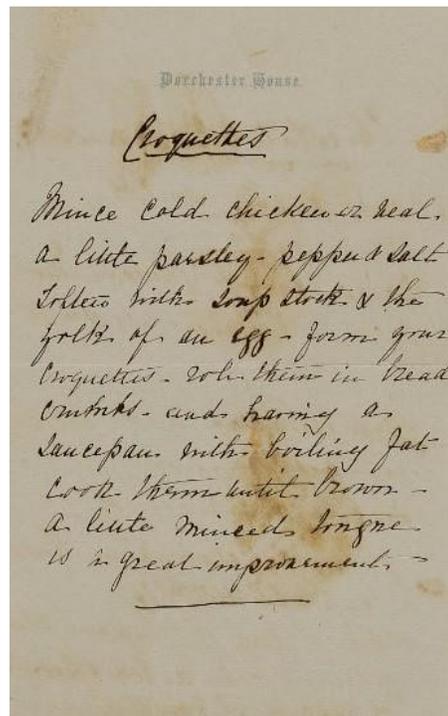
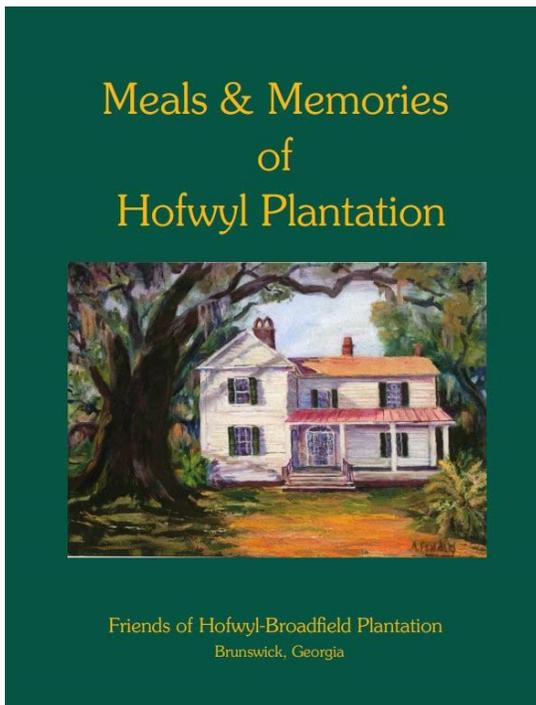
- 1. To assist the site manager with planning, organizing, and implementing special events. We also promote public awareness and public involvement in Hofwyl—Broadfield Plantation.**
- 2. To assist the site manager in all aspects of the site's operation as requested.**
- 3. To be an advocacy group charged with promoting public awareness of the Hofwyl—Broadfield Plantation as a significant and valuable historic resource.**
- 4. To restore and increase public support of and involvement in our Historic Site.**

Join us at 5:00 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month. We meet at the site office. For information, contact: Mason Stewart, President, 912-399-8809 or by email at mason_stewart@att.net.

Coming
Soon

Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation Cookbook

The Friends of Hofwyl have been working hard during this year of social distancing. We worked separately in our homes typing and editing recipes, drawing special illustrations, and testing recipes for our cookbook. It is going to be a very special addition to the plantation gift shop. The book is so much more than a cookbook, it is a history book. It describes the methods for preserving meats before refrigeration, contains recipes for spirits, recipes for cleaning supplies, and medical advice! To our delight some of the recipes had dates on them or mentioned the very special person that supplied the recipe to the family. Imagine recipes that span two centuries. The cookbook will be called Meals and Memories of Hofwyl Plantation. We will keep you informed on our progress. We are just as anxious as you are to get a copy!



Bird Watching on the Georgia Colonial Trail

Hofwyl–Broadfield Plantation

Georgia's Colonial Coast Birding Trail offers birders of all skill levels the opportunity to catch a glimpse of a variety of birds. More than 300 species have been seen on the trail, including painted buntings, bald eagles, and wood storks!

SPECIALTIES: Wood stork, bald eagle, osprey, glossy ibis, painted bunting, yellow-throated warbler.

TIPS: Look for warblers during spring and fall migrations, northern parulas and yellow-throated warblers in spring and summer, and clapper rails and marsh wrens in the marshes throughout the year. Ospreys are common in spring and summer.

For additional information, visit our website:

<https://georgiabirdingtrails.com/hofwyl-broadfield-plantation-state-historic-site>

You may pick up information about the Coastal Georgia Birding Trail and a bird checklist in the Hofwyl–Broadfield Plantation site office.



Winner of the 7th Annual Ophelia's Classic Car Challenge



1st place went to the 1936 Ford Phaeton entered by John Gibson

2nd place was the 1930 Willy's Whippet entered by Richard Padgett, Sr.

3rd place went to the 1963 Chevrolet Corvair entered by Debbie Graham

4th place was the 1951 Ford F1 Truck entered by Cheryl Hill

5th place went to the 1973 Volkswagen Thing entered by Stu Graham

The Peoples Choice Award to the 1951 Ford F1 Truck entered by Cheryl Hill

The Award for the Most Original went to Freddy Merritt 1951 Ford Truck

Thanks to all who entered vehicles or visited the park to see the cars!

Winners from left to right are:

1st place John Gibson

4th place Cheryl Hill

2nd place Richard Padgett, Sr.

5th place Stu Graham

3rd place Debbie Graham



Below left: Bill Giles, Site Manager, Stephanie Giles, Friend of Hofwyl

50/50 Raffle winners: Caroline Hodges, Georgia Williams, Finn Tucker and Stu Graham



Thank You All

Freddy Merritt and Ralph Babb of Fast Freddy's Hot Rod's did all of the mechanical work on Miss Ophelia's Oldsmobile. We appreciate the contribution of their labor and expertise. Bill Hill of Coastal Classic Cruisers is performing all of the body work, and he was able to get the paint donated.

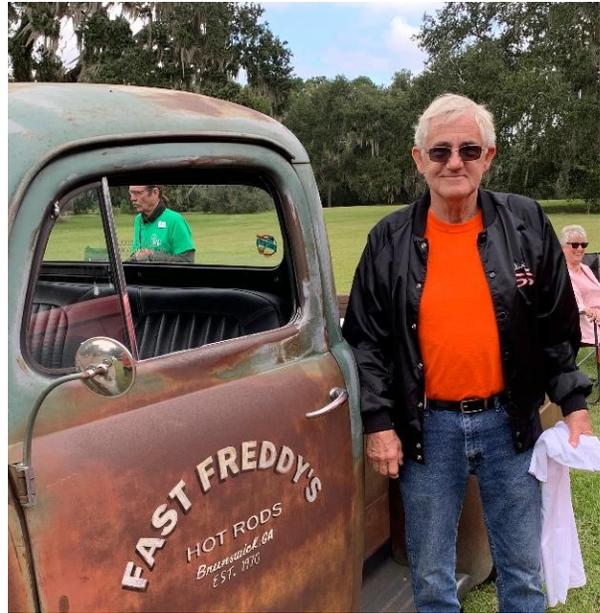


Photo by Troup Nightingale

“I guess they liked my cooking.”

by

S.T. Lanter



William Polite (left), Rudolph Capers (right) at Hofwyl. The two men, both long-term employees at Hofwyl, were first cousins (once removed) and grandsons of the legendary Hofwyl cook Fibby. Undated photo courtesy of Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation State Historic Site.

Rudolph Capers was born at ‘the Ridge’ north of Darien, now known as Ridgeville, November 12, 1903. He was the only child of Grant Capers and Louise Johnson Capers. *“I attended school [in Darien] until the 7th grade. That’s as far as I went ...”* Rudolph’s father worked at a small general store at ‘the Ridge’ until his untimely death when Rudolph was 12 years old. *“My mother [raised me up]. [I learned to cook] because I was the only child in the family ... I had to help ... do a whole lot of things around the house....”*

Rudolph knew the value of hard work for he picked up odd jobs since the day his father died. He fished for shrimp from a small boat, *“I used to do a little shrimp fishing ..., in my own small paddle boat. [I took the shrimp] down to different people’s houses, [and sold] them ... from house to house.”*

During the 1920's coastal McIntosh and Glynn Counties were forgotten backwaters where any employment was desperately sought. “[Besides fishing] *I used to work on a dredge one time, over where the Cloister was built over there on Sea Island. Out there, all that was made land....*”

Rudolph married Annie Rogers of Darien June 26, 1924. The marriage was a long and happy one. “*I don't know whether [we've been doing] something right or wrong. ... we've been together ... in the same house I was born in [since we married].*” Seven children, three sons and four daughters were born to them.

The Dent sisters hired him in 1933 upon the recommendation of Mrs. Sis Clifton who ran a popular tearoom “*The Tea Cup Inn*” in Darien. The ‘Inn’ doubled as the local ‘Liars Bench,’ that now vanished fixture of small-town Americana where people gathered to pass the time of day and gossip. Mrs. Clifton knew everyone and knew everyone’s business. The sisters interviewed and hired him on her recommendation.

Rudolph was to cook three meals daily and take care of the house. He reported for breakfast on Monday, worked Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, staying over at Hofwyl until after supper on Wednesday. Returning to work Friday morning and staying over until after supper on Saturday. On the nights he stayed over he slept in the old duplex slave cabin (which is why there is water, bathroom facilities and electricity where the public restrooms are now).

The Dent sisters liked “... *common food, greens and different kinds of vegetables, regular common food; that's all. They didn't have no special fancy [tastes], I made all the bread ... I [learned to make bread from my mother]. ... When I came here [in 1933] they had [a new] electric stove. They didn't have a wood stove at that time.*”

A typical day required many calories for the heavy physical demands of the dairy. Rudolph served breakfast at 8:00 a.m.—often tempting the sisters’ appetites with his homemade cinnamon rolls. The ‘heavy meal’ or dinner was at noon. As the sisters liked seafood, he made lobster bisque, perhaps deviled crab (his specialty), vegetables and homemade rolls. Supper consisted of sandwiches served before the sisters retired for the day at 9:30 p.m. Rudolph’s final task of the day was to make a large pot of coffee which the sisters would reheat when they arose at 4:30 a.m.

Rudolph rapidly became the sisters favorite cook, as Ophelia reported to her life-long friend Arabella in a 1933 letter:

... Rudolph is ... a treasure, really a good cook of the negro type of cooking, rice, corn bread, fish, crab, shrimp, all the pole beans, & everything we have asked him so far, & we like him a lot, hope he likes us!

His wife Annie believed his pay was too low for the number of hours he spent away from home leaving her to raise their large family alone. Records, in Ophelia's own hand, for the late 1960's and early 1970's, when Rudolph cut back his hours, show that he was paid from a high of \$350 to a low of \$120 a week—minus payroll withholdings.

December 7, 1941 changed everything, after eons of no jobs, the war ushered in more jobs than could be immediately filled. Brunswick became a major shipbuilding port. In all ship fitters built 99 liberty ships in Brunswick, from the first keel laying on July 6, 1942 to the last on June 7, 1945. The shipyard recruited, trained, and transported workers from their homes to the shipyard—cast aside old prejudices barring black workers from high paying, skilled jobs. There was a war to win—workers urgently needed! As the shipyard workers gained experience, shipyard managers established 'round-the-clock' shifts, reducing the construction time for a Liberty Ship from 305 days to as little as 34 days. Rudolph, with regret, left the sisters employ, tempted by the high wages the shipyards offered. As Ophelia ruefully reports to Arabella in September 1942:

Rudolph has paid us one social call, and aside from being dressed to kill in light blue pants, etc., he was the same nice Rudolph, & I get a wave from him almost daily when I am taking Jerry [Rutledge] home and he is going home in the rigged up bus that collects the shipyard workers in Darien. I certainly hope he intends to come back the end of Oct. as he said, but I doubt if he will, somehow.

Rudolph began working in the shipyard but later got a job as a bartender in the officer's club at the navy anti-submarine dirigible base (now the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center). Bartending was much easier on a man pushing 40 in 1942.

Rudolph returned to Hofwyl during the summer of 1949:

...we are basking & purring like Bell's Kitten, in the administrations of Rudolph. He seems as happy to be back as we are to have him, & so far has slipped into his old habits.... His cooking is not up to mine, as yet, but after 8 years of mixing drinks, it is only natural that he has forgotten and it will soon come back – and even if it doesn't, who cares? Not me!

“[Miss Ophelia] ... died on ... the 5th of September in 1973. Now at that time, I used to stay over here at nights. ... [S]he died on a Wednesday morning. I stayed here that Wednesday night and Thursday night, buried her on Friday the 7th of September.” Rudolph and five other black men, unbidden, carried Miss Ophelia’s casket from the back porch to the waiting hearse for the long trip to Savannah for burial.

Rudolph’s daughter Inez gives a less bland version of her father’s actions that day:

He was in a real state of grief and needed to express himself. He called his best friend William Polite and stopped by to see him. Then he came back to Hofwyl and went into the dining room as if preparing for the finest party. He took out a white linen tablecloth from the great sideboard and spread it lovingly on the table. He carefully selected Ophelia's best silver, china and crystal and the proper serving dishes and utensils. Then he set a place for her one last time.

Rudolph Capers worked for the Dent Sisters nearly forty years. Was this train of events occasioned by the recommendation of Mrs. Clifton that late summer day in 1933? Is it really that simple? Yes and no. Mrs. Clifton’s recommendation was ‘icing on the cake’ but not the sole reason. To Ophelia kinship, connections whether by blood, marriage, friendship, patron-client, were important. As Matt Schaeffer relates in his unpublished manuscript, *Ophelia D*:

You know William Polite who has worked here for so long. He is more than sixty years old. Well, his father Morris was foreman here. Morris' mother, Margaret, was cook here. Margaret's mother Fibby cooked here at Hofwyl for 53 years.

‘Fibby’ was a legend at Hofwyl. Matt Schaeffer speculates that ‘Fibby’ is a colloquialism for “Phoebe.” Ophelia knew ‘Fibby’ when she (Ophelia) was young. A review of the probate records for Dr. Troup’s estate in 1849 lists four women named “Phoeby [sic],” ‘Fibby’ was likely one of these women. It isn’t known if ‘Fibby’ was born in Africa—but Fibby had a connection to Hofwyl until her death in 1906—she and her descendants were almost kin. Fibby was the grandmother of Rudolph Capers. Ophelia knew this and because of this kinship provided for him to the best of her ability. After her death she left a trust to maintain Hofwyl and Rudolph continued to come in to Hofwyl on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. He became a celebrated docent for Hofwyl until his own death August 19, 1982.

Saturday, December 5th
40th Annual Christmas Tour



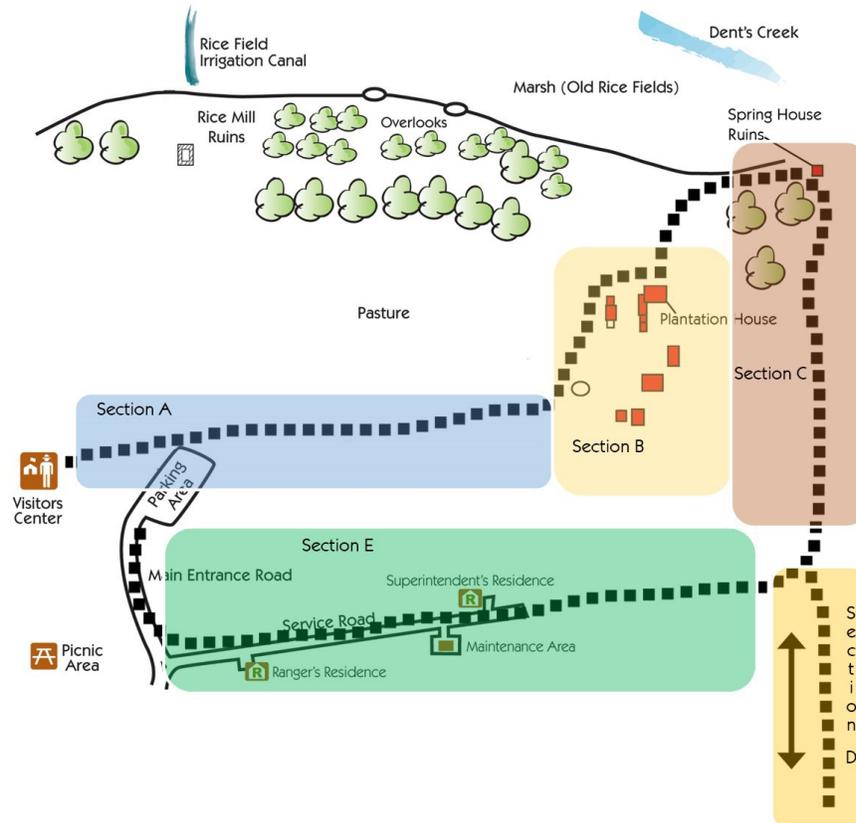
10:00 a.m. until 5 p. m

Cost is \$8 for adults, \$5 for youth, 6-17, Children 5 and under free

Pre-registration required for those attending to ensure crowd limits and social distancing. To reserve a space, please call the office at 912-264-7333.

Visitors will walk through centuries old live oaks and be treated to a guided tour of the 1850's plantation house specially decorated for Christmas. Several period dressed interpreters will share stories of the plantation's past. History buffs will enjoy Company A, 26th Georgia Volunteer Infantry and other units as they re-enact a pre-Civil War muster of the Glynn County Guards and the Brunswick Rifles Militia Units. There will be cannon and musket firings as well as demonstrations of camp life. After touring the house, enjoy hot Wassail (a spiced Christmas punch) prepared over an open fire in an authentic cast iron pot.

What's New at Hofwyl—Broadfield Plantation?



A Tree and Plant Identification Trail That's What!

The trees are marked for you with metal markers. Go by the office and pick up the map and the information folder. Over 30 varieties of trees are marked including : Live Oak, Water Oak, Sweet Gum, Southern Magnolia, Sago Palm, Cabbage Palm, Bald Cypress to name a few. Now that the weather has cooled off this is a great way to social distance by getting out of your house to enjoy nature. Plan to tour the interior of the plantation house on the hour from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday.