4– Bulletin

Bradley’s original 1812 Edge Hill house was replaced by the Rhett-Fox house, similar in footprint and design, using salvaged old bricks, heart pine flooring and wall paneling. The original detached kitchen had burned, and the Fox kitchen is part of the main house. Daughter Jane Brown’s family lives in the near-by “Cottage.” Other names historically associated with residence at Edge Hill are Nesbitt and Harris. Kate Rhett Fox grew up at Edge Hill from the age of eight, and with husband Jim reared their three children, Jane, Ruth, and Jimbo, whose children enjoy the family compound. Thus many generations of children and wall paneling. The original detached kitchen had burned, and the Fox kitchen is part of the main house. Daughter Jane Brown’s family lives in the near-by “Cottage.” Other names historically associated with residence at Edge Hill are Nesbitt and Harris. Kate Rhett Fox grew up at Edge Hill from the age of eight, and with husband Jim reared their three children, Jane, Ruth, and Jimbo, whose children enjoy the family compound. Thus many generations of children have played on the spacious grounds over the centuries, where a free house presides over Bradley Creek. Those who preserve Wilmington’s historic waterside family compounds are stewards of the land, resisting financial pressure to reduce them to commercial tracts. St. James Church has restored and maintains picturesque Lebanon Chapel, open in the summer season to worshippers of any persuasion. New Hanover County, with the help of dedicated volunteers and the cooperation of the Corbett family, welcomes all of us, local residents and visitors, to share one of our greatest natural assets, Airlie Gardens. Former Airlie gatekeeper and artist Minnie Evans, now renowned, immortalized Airlie with her imaginative drawings and paintings. Recently Wilmington artist Virginia Wright-Frierson created the colorful Bottle House, beloved by visitors. Airlie, the Garden of Wilmington, is now renowned, immortalized Airlie with her imaginative drawings and paintings. Recently Wilmington artist Virginia Wright-Frierson created the colorful Bottle House, beloved by visitors.

Let’s drive the slow way to the beach, past Uncle Bradley’s place,” our grandfather Ed Wootten would say, guiding his 1942 Nash beneath the canopy of moss-hung live oaks along Old Shell Road. A flock of piping plovers would often navigate the sandy, rutted trail through the Grove to the homes of my Jewett cousins and the Haskell Rhetts at the extended-family compound named Edge Hill. As the grownups conversed over tall glasses of iced tea, we children would play hide-n-seek on sloping acres of tree-shaded land bordering Bradley Creek, sip lemonade, and loll in the hammock to watch large, colorful spiders construct intricate webs. Life was very, very good for Wilmington families fortunate enough to own homes on the creeks and sounds, where they could enjoy sea breezes and escape the heat of town. They would compete in sailing races, fish from jon-boats, dig for oysters and clams, catch blue crab off the piers. As families expanded, the primary residence would be added on, and newer dwellings would appear nearby. Marriage would connect one family with another. A Jewett would marry a Bellamy, a MacMillan marry a Forbes, and so on. The man who started it all, the first Richard Bradley in Wilmington, was born to John Bradley in Kendall, Yorkshire, England, and emigrated to a Quaker community in Pennsylvania, where he married Elizabeth Ashbridge Sharpless. He came to Guilford, North Carolina, and to Wilmington, where he became Paymaster, dying in 1782 at the age of forty-eight. His son Richard Bradley II (also named Jr.) was born in 1769, married Rebecca Green, widowed, and was a manufacturer of salt, and partner in the mercantile company of John and Richard Bradley. The Bradleys became communicants at St. James Episcopal Church on South Third Street. The family motto was “We shall not live in idleness,” and stringent morals and ethics were passed down to each generation, based on the Ten Commandments.
Richard Bradley’s Edge Hill home (from Bradley-Jewett-Wootten collection)

On July 11, 1787, Bradley business partner and relative John Bradley shot and killed prominent Wilmingtonian Major Sam Swann, his friend, in the St. James Episcopal Church graveyard at Fourth and Market Streets. The gunfire was precipitated by Bradley’s accusation that Swann’s houseguest, a visiting Englishman, had stolen rings from the Bradley store. Swann challenged him to a duel, firing first with intent to merely inflict a flesh wound, and as Bradley felt his pistol butt penetrated Swann’s brain. Bradley was charged with the crime of murder, but before conviction, he was pardoned by North Carolina Governor Johnston at the behest of the General Assembly.

In 1808 Richard Bradley II purchased sixty-five acres of land bordering what became Bradley Creek, from his brother-in-law, Joshua Granger Wright, for five shillings, and bought another land along the marshes for salt production. His son Richard Bradley III was born in 1811 and grew up at Edge Hill, co-founding and serving as the first commodore of the Carolina Yacht Club at Wilmingtonville, in 1833. He married Sarah Jane Williams and died in 1892.

The Carolina Yacht Club was the first structure on Wilmingtonville Beach, then known as the Hatteras Banks. It was a seaside extension of Edge Hill, where Richard Bradley, his relatives and friends such as Parker Quince and John Reston, raced sailing yachts on Wilmingtonville Sound and the Atlantic Ocean. Bradley sailed on the Vixen, which was moored in Bradley Creek in front of his residence. The constant sailors needed shelter from sudden storms, and organized the CYC because it was due east from Bradley Creek, at Deep Inlet, before construction of the Intracoastal Waterway and spoil islands from Edge Hill, residents could hear ocean waves crashing on the shore. Our family has belonged to the CYC in every generation.

Historic Sound Properties

In 1880 Dr. Robert Drane Jewett, brother of our great-grandmother Eliza Yonge Jewett, who married Episcopal Reverend Edward Wootten, inhabited the Charlie Bradley two-story house of shipwreck timbers twigs and pine shingles, facing the Green-ville Sound, where his family could enjoy the salt air.

Dr. John Bellamy astride his horse at Edge Hill around 1900.

Astronomical Society, and the Wilmington Seacoast Railroad became an electric beach trolley in 1902, and a live oak-shad- ed pathway led from the trolley line to Edge Hill, which featured an enclosed bathhouse at the end of a gangway, and grounds surrounded by a white- washed picket fence. A cadre of servants cooked seafood and prepared meals in a kitchen separated from the main house, and offered boardwalks to be served in the formal dining room. Other servants kept the grounds in order, cleaning out the large barn and horse and cow paddocks, and tending nearby crops. Property owner Harriet Rhett, son of Sam Brungilton Gilles, part of the Bradley clan, would head into town each morning in his horse and buggy.