



The Bulletin

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"Edge Hill: A Way of Life"

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“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 turnpike now called Airlie. On summer Sundays after church downtown at Episcopal St. James, he would often navigate the sandy, rutted trail through the Grove to the homes of my Jewett cousins and the Haskell Rhett's 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.

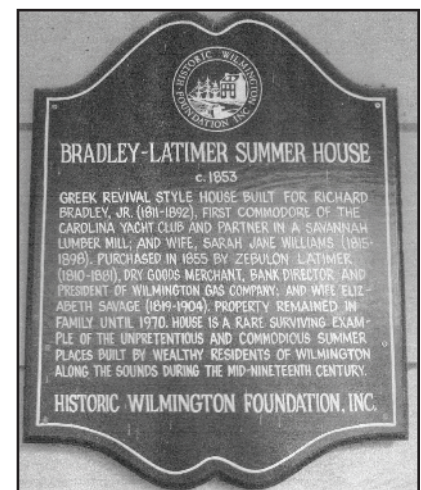
Life was very, very good for Wilmington families fortunate enough to own homes on the creeks and sounds, where they could enjoy sea breezes and escape the heat of town. They would compete in sailing races, fish from jon-boats, dig for oysters and clams, catch blue crab off the piers. As families expanded, the primary residence would be added onto, and newer dwellings would appear nearby. Marriage would connect one family with another. A Jewett would marry a Bellamy, a MacMillan marry a Rhett, a Bradley marry a Wright or Latimer or Hill or Giles or Harriss. To us children, everyone seemed to be a first, second, or third cousin, once or twice removed. Aunts and uncles were abundant. We felt secure in our interconnected world.

This has been the way of Edge Hill into its third century, still nestled next to Airlie Gardens only a few minutes from Wrightsville Beach. Gravestones in the brick-walled cemetery behind Lebanon Chapel, where Bradley Creek meets Wrightsville Sound, are a tribute to residents who once lived and played here. Not far away, in the 1800s the Charlie Bradley place was built on Greenville Sound at Hewlett's Creek of shipwreck timbers from Masonboro island. Generations of Jewett relatives still live in houses side-by-side

on this wide and deep expanse of land so picturesque it was often featured on the popular television series “Dawson's Creek.”

On Masonboro Sound in 1923, Edge Hill descendants purchased a waterfront tract from Rosa Cazaux for \$1,325, and built a summer home which closely resembled the original Edge Hill house on Bradley Creek. Brick and floor timbers were salvaged from old Union Public School at Sixth and Ann Streets.

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, married my ancestor Eliza Claudia Yonge, and died in 1834 of dropsy, fluid accumulation in the chest. President of the Bank of the Cape Fear, he 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.



Plaque on the Bradley-Latimer House at Bradley Creek.

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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 gunfight 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 fell his pistol ball 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.



Richard Bradley's Edge Hill home (from Bradley-Jewett-Wootten collection)

In 1808

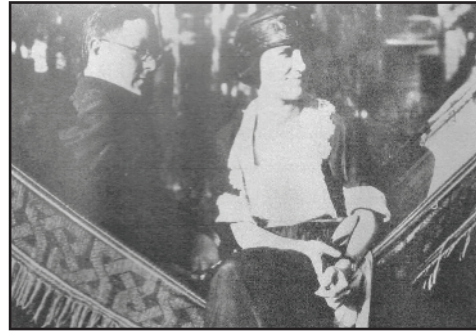
Richard Bradley II purchased sixty-five acres of land bordering what became Bradley Creek, from his brother-in-law, Joshua Grainger Wright, for five shillings, and

bought other 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 Wrightsville Beach, in 1853. He married Sarah Jane Williams and died in 1892.

The Carolina Yacht Club was the first structure on Wrightsville Beach, then known as the Hammocks. 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 Wrightsville Sound and the Atlantic Ocean. Bradley's yacht *Vixen* 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 from nearby Masonboro Island, on a knoll at Greenville Sound, where his family could enjoy the salt air.



Bob and Harriet Jewett in Edge Hill hammock in 1925 shortly before their marriage.

Referred to as Papa by his descendants, he later deeded part of the property to his daughter Frances, who married William Head and settled in the original Jewett house moved to its present site on

Hewlett's Creek, where it became a stand-in for Dawson's Creek. Dr. Jewett deeded adjacent property to his other daughter Margaret, who married Hugh McEachern. Frances' daughter Margaret Head and Margaret McEachern's son Rob grew up here and still live next door to each other with a view of the creek. Billy Head's daughter Laura lives nearby in a newer house with her Lambert family. His sister Jane Head still owns her share of the land. Rob's brother Sandy McEachern built his home not far away on Cedar Island overlooking the Intracoastal. Boats abide on every family property.

Similar compounds existed on the creeks and sounds, those of Parsley, Grainger, Hicks, Cowan, Peshau, Anderson, Carr, Willard, deRosset, Sprunt, Berry, Hooper, McKoy, Quince, Metts, Reston, Jones, Worth. Many of these multi-generational families intermarried. Though these historic homes may now have non-family owners, they survive as testament to the gracious

and active way of life once so prevalent here.

The Bradley-Latimer Summer House at Edge Hill is described in the National Register of Historic Places as "a rare surviving example of the unpretentious and commodious sound



Bradley-Latimer House in original form.

houses built by wealthy residents of Wilmington," during a "period before the Civil War when the properties along the sounds near Wilmington were changing from farming, salt production, and lumbering uses, to quiet summer retreats of prominent Wilmingtonians." The central breezeway and wraparound porch are typical of these homes which were designed to make best use of sea breezes and the water view which was ever-changing as tides rose and fell. Life here was measured by the tides. Over the years, fireplaces

and bathrooms and kitchens have been modernized, with central heat and air conditioning, but the fundamental structures remain the same.

A century after the death of Richard Bradley III, Judge James Fox, the current resident of Edge Hill with his wife Katherine Rhett Fox, whose mother was Jane MacMillan Rhett, has moored his own sailing yacht at the same site and also served as a CYC commodore. However, this contemporary boat was not an homage to Bradley's boat, but was christened *Vixen* to honor Jim's attractive and spirited wife Kate, because the word means female fox. Resourceful Jane Rhett lived to the age of eighty-six in her home at the family compound and hosted her own cooking show on WECT-TV during the 1950s. Her recipe for Edge Hill crab cakes was published in the Ministering Circle cookbook:

Mix 1 lb crab meat with 1 slightly beaten egg, 1 t dry mustard, 2 ts mayonnaise, 1/8 t pepper, 1 t Worcestershire sauce, 1 t Angostura bitters, 1 t chopped parsley and 1 t salt. Make into cakes, dip into milk and cracker crumbs. Bake at 375 degrees for 20 minutes, and serve with caper sauce.

Bradley's Edge Hill property, built in 1812, was in 1820 deeded to Annabella Giles, then purchased by Jane Rhett's father W. D. MacMillan as a year-round residence. In Emma Woodward MacMillan's book *Wilmington's Vanished Homes and Buildings*, Harriet Bellamy Jewett, also a Giles, reminisces about the old days, describing the Giles lands as including many acres across the creek, on land now occupied by Bradley Creek Marina. A century ago, a plank gangway connected the two sides. An adjacent Bradley home was built in 1853, when he helped found the Carolina Yacht Club, and is now owned by Jane Rhett's grandson Jimbo Fox. In May 2012, the City of Wilmington will christen a plank gangway across the headquarters of Bradley Creek, for pedestrian and bicycle use as a segment of the cross-city trail.

Lifestyle

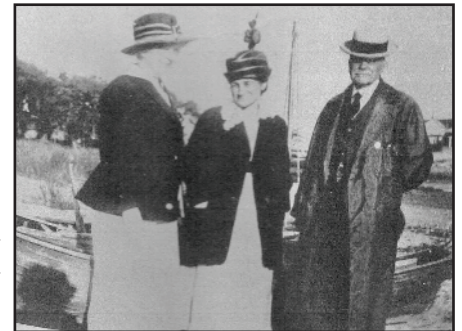
The Wilmington Seacoast Railroad became an electric beach trolley in 1902, and a live oak-shaded pathway led from the trolley line to Edge Hill, which featured an enclosed bathhouse at the end of a gangway, and grounds surrounded by a white-washed picket fence. A cadre of servants caught seafood and prepared meals in a kitchen separated from the main house, transporting the food over a boardwalk 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 the vegetable garden. Property owner Clayton Giles, part of the Bradley clan, would head into town each morning in his horse and buggy.



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

An artesian well near the creek provided running water via an automatic ram which fed into a large wooden tank high in the air in the back of the house. Ice was delivered from town by a freight car on the trolley line, and stored in sawdust in

an ice house adjacent to the house. When illness struck the family or servants, Harriet Bellamy Jewett's great-grandmother, Almeria Reston Giles, experienced in medical care, would provide nursing assistance. Self-sufficiency was paramount in those early days living ten miles away from town, and Edge Hill was known for its



John Bellamy with family members at Edge Hill on Bradley's Creek, c. 1900.

hospitality to frequent visitors. Sundays were considered sacred, with the family in attendance at nearby Mount Lebanon Chapel, and only essential work was performed on this day of rest.

Pembroke Jones Jr. with his wife Sarah Green would become legendary as the owners of the Wright tract they named Airlie Gardens. A great-great-grandson of Wilmington's first Richard Bradley and his Quaker wife Elizabeth Sharpless, Jones' good friend was Henry Walters, president of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. As a tribute to the high regard Walters felt for Pembroke, he married Pembroke's widow Sarah three years after the death of her husband.

In the 1800s, Bradley lands extended from both sides of Bradley Creek north to Old Shell Road and east to Wrightsville Sound. Our branch of the family no longer holds title to Edge Hill, but we still enjoy riding past by car or bicycle several times a day on shaded Airlie Road. We are grateful to the Rhett-Fox contingent for preserving the traditional way of life with their five residences and other structures, despite daunting property tax increases which have caused other historic family compounds to be sold, subdivided, and developed. Visiting on the porch with Judge Jim and Kate Fox, son Jimbo Fox, daughters Jane Fox Brown, Ruth Fox Jordan, and Haskell Rhett's widow Sue Bonner Rhett, we enjoy the water view while listening to the sighs of the huge ancient oak trees with their tales to tell, bringing back good memories of old times.

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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 nearby "Cottage." Other names historically associated with residence at Edge Hill are Nesbitt and Harriss. 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 tree 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 children. Sculptures of other artists and flocks of wild

geese, ducks, and swans decorate the Airlie grounds. The Wilmington bicycle-pedestrian trail crosses over Bradley Creek bridge, with a scenic view of Edge Hill, which endures as the legacy of Wilmington's water-side extended families is enhanced and lives on.

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Chronicles of the Cape Fear River by James Sprunt

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