

**TOWN**    
**OF BLUFFTON**  
WELCOME CENTER

FOLLOW THE HEART OF BLUFFTON:  
A LOVE LETTER

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## VISION STATEMENT

*A Love Letter to Bluffton*

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*DEAREST BLUFFTON, MY LOVE,*

Your memory is as sweet and familiar as a gentle wave or a nostalgic smile from atop our town's porches. Rocking in our chairs, we exchange stories of your life - one that will continue far past our years. You are the land, the river, the breeze, and the people. From the unfurling of fragrant magnolias in Spring to the fresh catch of Bluffton oysters in Fall, you are our heritage, our comfort, our blessing, and our family.

With blissful wanderlust, you have sailed into our hearts like the May River. Your last letter flew from our hands and was ripped into pieces. Since then, you have become our only state of mind, and we miss the embrace of your warm sunlight and lush live oak arms. You remember us, and by piecing together the fragments of your lost letter, we will remember you. Bluffton, you are our home.

*LOVE,*

Your Blufftonians

*P.S.*

Our romance with Bluffton is a story that is still being written. We invite you to find your heart in the Lowcountry and add a line to our love letter.

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## INTRODUCTION

This document highlights the history of Bluffton, South Carolina through the lens of its civic romance for the use of the Town of Bluffton Welcome Center at the Squire Pope Carriage House. Beginning with a lost love letter, included prior, a timeline is organized as nine periods from early habitation in the Beaufort County area until the present era. The subsequent research, presented below, was gathered consulting monographs, local newspapers, state magazines, peer-reviewed journals, master's theses, and archival materials courtesy of the Caldwell collections in Bluffton, as well as government plans and documents released by the Town of Bluffton. Then, the information is organized into two parts. Part I addresses the timeline periods in Bluffton, and Part II takes a closer look at personal stories of past and present Blufftonians. As a working document, citations are highlighted with red text in lieu of footnotes. From this compiled information, display boards, brochures, digital interactive media, and further educational materials may be produced.

**PART I**

FOLLOW THE HEART THROUGH TIME

## 01

PRE-BLUFFTON & NATIVE HERITAGE

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*The first love letter ever written to Bluffton was scrawled in sand and pounded from reeds. It floated on the breeze and drifted along the shore of the May River, borne from simple stories of light and life.*

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## 1674: MAY RIVER POSSIBLY NAMED

- Some research indicates that English colonist, Dr. Henry Woodward named the May River as he was one of the first settlers in the Beaufort County Area
- Maps of the era indicate that the name was initially spelled “Maye River”
- **Bluffton Historical Preservation Society. A Short History of the Early Days of Bluffton, South Carolina. Hilton Head: Impressions Printing Co., 1983.**

## 1689: YEMASSEE INDIANS SETTLE IN CAROLINA

- Originally home to over 1,200 Yemassee Indians, a multi-ethnic amalgamation of several remnant Indian groups, which included the Guale, La Tama, Apalachee, Coweta, and Cusseta Creek
- They arrived in the more welcoming Carolina area after revolting against and fleeing Spanish missionaries in northern Florida who were attempting to send captive Yamasees to the West Indies as slaves c.1687
- Yamasees also allegedly sought out opportunities for trading and education in the Carolina area
- **Bossy, Densie I., ed. The Yamasee Indians: From Florida to South Carolina. University of Nebraska Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv7vct9s>.**

## 1715: YEMASSEE WAR

- They established about ten villages in what is now the Beaufort area and were often reported to have worked with European colonists to capture and enslave members of other native groups
- The 1715 Yemassee War, caused by both inter-tribal turmoil and tensions due to being indebted to European colonists led to the Yemassee primarily migrating back to Florida, making way for large European settlements on the previously inhabited lands



- Bossy, Densie I., ed. *The Yamasee Indians: From Florida to South Carolina*. University of Nebraska Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv7vct9s>.

## 02

## BLUFFTON BEGINNINGS

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*Every intricate turn is lovingly documented in the letter, and milestones are cradled in the ever-growing pages.  
Through triumph and trouble, the letter continues to grow longer.*

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**1718: BARONY SYSTEM ESTABLISHED**

- In 1718, the Lords Proprietors (English charters) sectioned the area into several new baronies following the departure of the Yemassee which included the Devil's Elbow Barony, a section that contained the area that is now the Town of Bluffton
- “Relocation - Greater Bluffton Chamber of Commerce, SC.” n.d. <https://blufftonchamberofcommerce.org/relocation>.
- The first titled landowner in the area was Sir John Colleton, a planter from Barbados who sold off much of his barony to the Rose, Kirk, and Pope families.
- Smith, Henry A. M. “The Baronies of South Carolina.” *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 13, no. 3 (1912): 119–25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27575336>.

**1728: PLANTATION SYSTEM**

- Plantations began appearing around 1728, and with easy travel by water between Savannah and Charleston, the area quickly became a significant point of commerce
- The geographical qualities of the May River attracted families to the area, as they allowed for the land to be cooler and freer of disease-ridden mosquitoes which often afflicted Lowcountry plantations
- Many of these plantations were later destroyed by the British during the American Revolution, and homes soon began appearing on the land.
- “Bluffton - South Carolina Encyclopedia.” 2022. *South Carolina Encyclopedia*. July 19, 2022. <https://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/bluffton/>.
- Star, Rock. 2023. “Wright Family Park and Calhoun Street Dock.” Bluffton SC. January 27, 2023. <https://www.blufftonsc.com/the-new-wright-family-park-and-calhoun-street-dock/>.

**C. 1795: HUGER-GORDON HOUSE BUILT**

- Located at 9 Water Street
- Only house directly located on the bluff that was spared the burning of Bluffton
- Believed to have been first built around 1795 and enlarged in 1820s
- Named after previous owners Dr. Joseph Alson Huger II and Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Gordon
- **A Guide to Historic Bluffton. Bluffton Historical Preservation Society, 2007.**

## 03

## AN ANTEBELLUM BLUFFTON

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*As a Bluffton society expands outward, the pages grow longer, denser, and more complex. Enchanted words seem to breathe on their own, no longer floating, but dreamily waltzing on the wind.*

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## EARLY 1800s: GULLAH CULTURE

- Rice farming takes off due to expertise from enslaved West Africans
- **Martin, By Grant. 2012. "Palmetto Bluff to Re-Create History with 40 Acres of Rice Fields - Beaufort News - IslandPacket.Com." July 4, 2012.**  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20120914233748/http://www.islandpacket.com/2012/07/04/2124776/palmetto-bluff-to-re-create-history.html>.
- Traditional Gullah Neighborhoods are established across Beaufort, mirroring the 10 towns/villages established by the Yemassee
- Cultural influence appears in the form of food, arts, and spiritual culture
- **Campbell, Emory S. 2005. *Gullah Cultural Legacies: A Synopsis of Gullah Traditions...* 2nd ed. Gullah Heritage Consulting Services.**

## 1823: MAY RIVER ACADEMY OPENED

- Savannah Newspaper reported on the opening
- Established "for the reception of young ladies and gentlemen" - coeducational
- As a place to prepare individuals for further learning at universities
- Principal was Mr. Gilbert
- Trustees of the School were: John McNish, James Kirk, and William Pope, Jr.
- **Bluffton Historical Preservation Society. *A Short History of the Early Days of Bluffton, South Carolina.* Hilton Head: Impressions Printing Co., 1983.**

## C. 1835: CARD HOUSE BUILT

- Located at 34 Bridge Street
- Believed to be one of the oldest houses in Bluffton
- First owner was William J. Graham
- Additions to the house were made over time
- Name rumored to have origins from an 1840s poker game where the house was allegedly bet and lost by the owner

- *A Guide to Historic Bluffton. Bluffton Historical Preservation Society, 2007.*

#### C. 1835: FRIPP HOUSE BUILT

- Located at 48 Bridge Street
- The only two-story central hall typology in Bluffton, a style known as the “Beaufort Style,” also seen at Verdier House in Beaufort
- Built by James L. Pope
- The house remained in the Pope family until 1883
- The Fripp family acquired the property in 1855 and sold it in 1919
- *A Guide to Historic Bluffton. Bluffton Historical Preservation Society, 2007.*

#### 1839: FIRST POST OFFICE

- May 21, 1839
- Named May River Post Office
- US postmaster: Burwell Wiggins
- Renamed to Bluffton Post Office April 22, 1842
- *Government Publishing Office, United States. Post Office Department. Government Publishing Office, June 1847.*

#### PRE 1840: “KIRK’S LANDING”

- The town was originally, and briefly, known as "Kirk's Landing" or "Kirk's Bluff" until the early 1840s and the first streets were formally laid
- Formed on two adjoining parcels in the Devil's Elbow Barony, (purchased by Benjamin Walls and the aforementioned James Kirk) and the name of Bluffton was a deal brokered by Robert Barnwell Rhett
- *“Relocation - Greater Bluffton Chamber of Commerce, SC.” n.d. <https://blufftonchamberofcommerce.org/relocation>.*

#### 1841: COLE HEYWARD HOUSE BUILT

- Located at 70 Boundary Street
- Earliest parts of the house were built by John J. Cole
- Later, multiple additions were built onto the house
- Subsequent owners were members of the Cole, DuBois, and Heyward families
- Ownership remained in the Heyward family until the 1998 sale to the Bluffton Historical Preservation Society
- *A Guide to Historic Bluffton. Bluffton Historical Preservation Society, 2007.*

**1843: CALHOUN STREET DOCK**

- Bluffton's population was growing because of its location on the Bluff, as planters would flee from their plantations on lower land because of fear of disease from mosquitoes/miasma
- The dock was only used during summer months and made way for steamboats
- No accessible passenger railroads
- Stagecoach road from Savannah to Bluffton = 25 miles, could take four to eight hours for travel depending on horse and type of wagon
- A ferry landing was put on the Back and Savannah Rivers (across from downtown district) but a roundtrip to Savannah was a three-day trek (two days traveling and one day in the city)
- Used for both private and commercial activities
- Ferry service to Savannah/Charleston was introduced by 1843
- Most everything was imported by boat now
- [Fulgham, Jeff. The Bluffton Expedition. Jeff Fulgham, 2012. Pages 4-7.](#)

**C. 1850: SQUIRE POPE CARRIAGE HOUSE BUILT**

- Located at 111 Calhoun Street
- What is today known as the carriage house was built around 1850 and the additional structures were joined in 1865
- Was part of the outbuildings for Squire Williams Pope's summer house on the May River
- However, the three former outbuildings were not used as a carriage house, despite the name
- [A Guide to Historic Bluffton. Bluffton Historical Preservation Society, 2007.](#)

**C. 1850: ALLEN LOCKWOOD HOUSE BUILT**

- Was likely built prior to 1850
- Located at 94 Calhoun Street
- Built by William Gaston Allen in the early 1850s
- Another example of the Lowcountry summer cottage typology
- Allen's wife purchased the home at Sherriff's sale
- [A Guide to Historic Bluffton. Bluffton Historical Preservation Society, 2007.](#)

**C. 1850: SEVEN OAKS BUILT**

- Located at 82 Calhoun Street
- The first iteration of the house was built around 1850

- The house's first owner was Lieutenant Middleton Stuart
- Later, the structure was used as a boarding house under Mrs. Elizabeth Sanders in the 1920s
- The house is allegedly haunted
- [A Guide to Historic Bluffton. Bluffton Historical Preservation Society, 2007.](#)

#### C. 1850: SEABROOK HOUSE BUILT

- Located at 47 Lawrence Street
- Built between the 1840s and 1850s
- Another example of the Lowcountry cottage
- Original owner was John Archibald Seabrook
- In 2000, Mr. and Mrs. Van DuBose restored the house
- [A Guide to Historic Bluffton. Bluffton Historical Preservation Society, 2007.](#)

#### 1852: BLUFFTON INCORPORATED

- Eventually, a steamboat landing was built at the end of Calhoun Street allowing planters to commute back and forth from their plantations to their cottages, encouraging the town to be officially incorporated by an act of the South Carolina General Assembly in 1852
- ["Bluffton, S.C. Historical Marker." 2023. March 30, 2023.   
https://hmdb.org/m.asp?m=219148.](#)

#### 1853: OLD METHODIST CHURCH CONSTRUCTED

- [Fripp, Nellie Hassell. Bluffton and the Oakatie. Beaufort: Beaufort Historical Society, 1951. Page 10.](#)

#### 1857: CHURCH OF THE CROSS CONSTRUCTED

- This church replaced an 1845 chapel, which the congregation outgrew
- Original budgeted cost to construct the church was \$5,000 according to a Post and Courier Article dated June 27, 1854
- Colonel Edward Brickell White of Charleston was the architect for the project
- The building committee included Thomas F. Drayton, J.J. Pope, G. Henry Guerard, and William. J. Graham
- During the Civil War, Union Soldiers were sent from Hilton Head to Bluffton to burn the town
- Soldiers also ripped out the pipe organ and sunk it in the May River, tore out the pulpit, and destroyed the Pinckney Sundial in the churchyard which was never found

- The bell was also taken, but later returned to the steeple
- Fripp, Nellie Hassell. *Bluffton and the Oaktie*. Beaufort: Beaufort Historical Society, 1951. Page 8-9.

**1859: HENRY TIMROD MOVES TO BLUFFTON**

- American Poet, Henry Timrod, taught at Hugh Train's private school after visiting Bluffton in 1850
- Fripp, Nellie Hassell. *Bluffton and the Oaktie*. Beaufort: Beaufort Historical Society, 1951. Page 5.



## 04

## BLUFFTON UNDER SIEGE

*With an open window comes the river breeze and our letter, only halfway finished, flies from Blufftonian hands and into the fireplace. It burns, and with it much of our history.*

## 1844: THE BLUFFTON MOVEMENT

- July 31, 1844, “the Bluffton Movement” began and led SC to secede from the Union on December 20, 1860
- Many things led to the movement such as: rights of enslaved people, state’s rights, the 1828 and 1842 federal tariffs, and the proposed annexation of Texas, and the acquisition of Oregon and California
- Many different people tried many different things to bridge the gap but there was no unified effort by the south, so nothing seemed to happen
- Bluffton and St. Luke’s Parish men formed a committee and Robert Barnwell Rhett (congressman for district) (along with others) spoke on the problems that were plaguing the South
- Around 500 people showed up to the oak tree to listen
- Robert Barnwell Rhett was known as the “enfant terrible” by the North
- The movement was like a party with speeches and booze
- Robert Barnwell Rhett was eventually deemed the “father of secession” though many still saw him as an extremist and “South Carolina hotspur”
- **A Guide to Historic Bluffton. Bluffton Historical Preservation Society, 2007.**
- “Bluffton Boys” was the term that people used to describe those who believed/supported the movement
- “Sown the first noteworthy seeds of secession in SC”
- **Fulgham, Jeff. The Bluffton Expedition. Jeff Fulgham, 2012. Pages 7-10.**

## 1863: UNION TROOPS BURN THE TOWN

- A growing Bluffton came to a halt once the war began, and Federal forces captured Hilton Head Island on November 17, 1861
- Bluffton was evacuated and everything was abandoned
- 1862: federal troops visited Bluffton three different times but only took some furnishings
- Confederate forces used Bluffton as a headquarters branching out to put lookouts (for federal troops in Pritchard) along the rivers

- June 1863: General David Hunter (Hilton Head) ordered Colonel Barton (Pulaski) to destroy Bluffton
- The town (2/3 of it) burned on June 4, 1863
- **Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Company. Bluffton, 1929, Unpublished. Accessed October 23, 2023. <https://digital.tcl.sc.edu/digital/collection/SFMAPS/id/3470/>.**
- The only things left were two churches and about fifteen houses in the center of town
- Only two churches and eight houses remain today
- So many Blufftonians were bankrupt after the war that all of their things were basically repossessed by the government (all from the North)
- Some families came back (from the North), and a few new families also came and started to rebuild Bluffton
- These people were merchants rather than planters, and Bluffton became a commercial center (Patz brothers, the Peeples family)
- Economy tied closely to May River and forest products
- Lots of summer visitors came in
- **A Guide to Historic Bluffton. Bluffton Historical Preservation Society, 2007.**

#### 1872: OLD METHODIST CHURCH SOLD TO BLACK CONGREGANTS

- Named Campbell chapel in 1874
- Sold to nine freedmen in 1872
- We do know the names of everyone: Renty Fields, Jacob Chisolm, William Ferguson, Jeffrey Buncomb, William Smith (or Smiley), David Heyward, Christopher Bryan, Theodor Wilson and William Lightburn
- Currently being renovated
- **Fripp, Nellie Hassell. Bluffton and the Oakatie. Beaufort: Beaufort Historical Society, 1951. Page 10.**
- **“Campbell Chapel AME Church - SC Historic Properties Record.” South Carolina Historic Properties Record. Accessed October 23, 2023. <https://schpr.sc.gov/index.php/Detail/properties/53736>.**
- **“Campbell Chapel A.M.E. Historical Marker.” The Historical Marker Database, March 26, 2023. <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=218551>.**

## 05

## TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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*Bluffton: a sight for sore eyes. Picking through the cinders, slowly a few pieces of our love letter reveal themselves.*

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## 1899: THE BLUFFTON OYSTER COMPANY

- “A Family Run Operation since 1899, The Bluffton Oyster Company actually sits on reclaimed land, built up by more than a hundred years of discarded shells from previous shucking operations. The oyster business thrived in early Bluffton and throughout the 1920’s, with five different oyster operations in the area.”
- “Our History.” Bluffton Oyster Co | Oysters, shrimp, crabs and fish in Bluffton near Hilton Head, March 25, 2015. <https://blufftonoyster.com/history/history-3/>.
- Rosie Berdych: In 1913, Lewis Wickes Hine took this photo of Rosie Berdych shucking an oyster for her job at Bluffton’s Barn and Platt Canning Company. A photo of Rosie was part of a series of photos that Hine took, documenting child labor for the National Child Labor Committee. These photos played a very big role in enacting child labor laws in the 1920s.
- Kaufman, Barry. “Unknown Stories of Bluffton: Rosie: How Bluffton Reshaped Child-Labor Laws.” LOCAL Life | Hilton Head Island & Bluffton. Accessed October 11, 2023. <https://www.locallifesc.com/unknown-stories-of-bluffton-rosie-how-bluffton-reshaped-child-labor-laws/>.
- Wallace, Vaughn. “Tracking down Lewis Hine’s Forgotten Child Laborers.” Time Magazine, November 27, 2013. <https://time.com/3805208/tracking-down-lewis-hines-forgotten-child-laborers/>.
- Manning, Joe. “Rose Berdych, Bluffton, South Carolina.” Mornings on Maple Street, 2011. <https://morningsonmaplestreet.com/2015/01/18/rose-berdych/>.
- There were three oyster factories: Carnot’s, Joe’s, and Bluffton
- The oyster factories employed many Black people (women, men, and children) after the Civil War. Before/during the Civil War, there was a Polish workforce at Varn and Platt Canning Company
- Besides farming and domestic work, oystering was the only other available work for freedmen
- At Carnot’s, the women would shuck the oysters, and the men would bring them in
- The shucking of the oysters was like music to many people
- Oscar Frazier wrote a poem: “Oyster Days Last Forever”

- Powell, Mary. *Back Home Roots*. Columbia: The R.L. Bryan Company, 2005. Pages 36-44.
- During WWI, oyster production fell due to labor shortage
- In 1919, production was back up
- In 1905, a Bluffton Oyster Company (plus the Pongees Island Plant) had used over 250,000 bushels of oysters and had packed 6,938,160 ounces of meat for a yield of 27 ounces per bushel in the 1904-1905 season
- Polish people were the primary workers for oyster companies during slavery
- After slavery, Polish and Black people were employed and by 1919 Polish workers were supplanted by a Black workforce
- Burrell, Victor Jr. *South Carolina Oyster Industry: A History*. Charleston: V.G. Burrell Publishing, 2003. Pages 10-11, 20.
- The Bluffton Oyster Company has occupied a site longer than any other oyster-shucking house in SC
- 1890s to 1900s it was a meetinghouse for a gentlemen's club
- Clarence "Buster" Martin obtained it in the early 1900s and ran it until 1930
- Junior Graves got back from college and started the oyster company there in 1932 - it was dilapidated, and he refurbished it
- He leased it from the Town of Bluffton using oyster shells which were used to pave the streets (all streets were paved with oyster shells before WW2)
- A tornado in 1933 damaged factory, and it was repaired and operated on until Graves built a home adjacent to Wharf Street in 1948
- Graves died in 1964 and his heirs ran the company for a short time
- The Bluffton co-op was next to occupy the building
- The Bluffton co-op was made up of Black oyster workers, who wanted oyster shucking to continue, so they kept their jobs
- The Bluffton co-op lasted until 1982 when it went bankrupt
- Jerry Reeves and a group of local businessmen bought the assets of the Bluffton co-op (includes building, six acres, and questionable rights to oyster leases)
- Wanted to keep the oyster tradition going and maybe put a restaurant on the site
- Reeves also operated Island Resort Services (laundry and linen service for resorts in area)
- Wanted oyster workers to work there in the busy summer season, but laundry business was good all year round so they hired people who were oyster workers to work laundry all year round
- Reeves' son, Michael, ran the business until 1993 when he needed to go back to the laundry business
- Bought out partners so it was just Reeves at this point
- Hired Larry Toomer (by this time it was named Bluffton Oyster Company again)
- Toomer took over operation in 1995 with his sister and leased the place from Reeves

- Tommer bought out his sister in 1998 and then owned it with his wife, Tina
- They built a loyal workforce and customer base
- Also moved into shedding peeler crabs in Spring and handling hard crabs in Summer along with shrimp and finfish, also marketed clams
- Couldn't meet demands for oysters most of season and through the use of inventory control, were able to extend the season by freezing products as weather warmed
- Catering was a huge part of their business (feature oyster roasts with country stew and fried fish)
- Reeves sold the company, the land, and the boat to Beaufort County open land trust in the early 2000s
- Stipulation was that the "oyster factory" must be allowed to continue operation so the tradition will be perpetuated in Bluffton
- **Burrell, Victor Jr. South Carolina Oyster Industry: A History. Charleston: V.G. Burrell Publishing, 2003. Pages 36-38.**

#### 1903: BLUFFTON RE-INCORPERATED

- Incorporated on April 22 as part of the Acts and Joint Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina
- Mr. Guilford was instrumental to Bluffton being incorporated in 1903 and became mayor after the 1903 incorporation for 11 consecutive years
- **South Carolina Secretary of State. South Carolina Secretary of State to the House Legislative Oversight Committee, January 17, 2020. South Carolina Digital Archives. <https://www.scstatehouse.gov/CommitteeInfo/HouseLegislativeOversightCommittee/AgencyWebpages/SecretaryofState/List%20of%20S.C.%20municipalities%20with%20date%20of%20incorporation%20and%20county%20in%20which%20located.pdf>.**
- **Simpson, Joshua M. "Historic Downtown Bluffton Renovation." Lowcountry Home Magazine, June 20, 2023. <https://www.lowcountryhome.com/historic-downtown-bluffton-renovation/>.**

#### 1905: THE PEEPLES

- There are many stories about the Peeples family. They owned the general store and Andrew Peeples wrote a book called "Bluffton Boy" that has many stories in it about Bluffton. There was also Luke Peeples who was a composer and produced many different songs, getting most of his inspiration from black spirituals, which allowed him to continue the stories of those that lived in Bluffton in the early 1900s. He also helped establish the May River Spiritual Singers, who came in first place at the Campbell AME Church spiritual concert-contest.

- “The Peeples Family.” The Graves House, May 21, 2022. [https://www.graveshouse.org/?page\\_id=595](https://www.graveshouse.org/?page_id=595).
- Lauderdale, David. “Odd Bluffton Musical Genius Gets His Voice in ‘A Gullah Psalm.’” The Island Packet, 2014. <https://www.islandpacket.com/opinion/opn-columns-blogs/david-lauderdale/article33557571.html>.
- Edmunds, Emma. “Slouching Towards Bluffton.” Atlanta Weekly, June 27, 1982.

#### 1916: BLUFFTON’S FIRST TELEPHONE

- Newspaper article from the Beaufort Gazette states that the first telephone was installed in November
- In addition, at this time, there were also plans to light Bluffton with gas streetlamps
- Fripp, Nellie Hassell. *Bluffton and the Oakatie*. Beaufort: Beaufort Historical Society, 1951. Page 14.

#### 1926: HIGHWAY 17 COMPLETED IN BLUFFTON

- In 1926, US-17 and the bridge at Port Wentworth were finished which meant another decline for Bluffton
- The highway took tons of business away from a recovering Bluffton after the Civil War
- Still a popular place for summer getaway
- No longer a commercial spot for riverboats because everything was being shipped by trucks on the highway
- Once the Great Depression came, Bluffton received the final hit as many people left it by the wayside
- It was not until the competition surrounding Hilton Head’s development that Bluffton began to come back to life
- Freight went by trucks and people went to Savannah for shopping
- The boats that were vital to Bluffton's trading center declined and basically disappeared
- “Bluffton, SC History - The Story Behind Bluffton.” DOT Real Estate. Accessed October 11, 2023. <https://www.blufftonrealestates.com/bluffton-history.php>.
- “The Town of Bluffton and Its History.” Bluffton.com, August 19, 2022. <https://www.bluffton.com/the-town-of-bluffton-and-its-history/>.

#### 1934: BOLTON BROWN MOVED TO BLUFFTON

- Bolton Brown moved to Bluffton after spending several Winters there
- Was a New York artist and lithographer
- Influenced a “Mrs. McCracken” of Bluffton who also produced sketches of local scenery and houses - some of her drawings were featured in postcards

- Fripp, Nellie Hassell. Bluffton and the Oaktie. Beaufort: Beaufort Historical Society, 1951. Page 7.

## 06

## POST-WORLD WARS BLUFFTON

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*The pieces of our letter are taped back together, but many pieces are still missing. Although Bluffton has changed, our love has grown deeper. We must start a new love letter.*

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## 1943: MONASTARY AT GOOD SHEPHERD ISLAND

- Also referred to as “Potato Island” by locals, which is 2 miles down the May River from Bluffton
- Abbot was Father David Stephen, who changed his name from Nathaniel Peeples before accepting holy orders
- The main monastic building on the island was the oratory, which was built in concrete masonry units and painted white
- There was also a bell tower, as well as, cells, a library, community room, kitchen, barns, and poultry rooms
- The habit of the monks was a white tunic with a scapular and hood
- The monastery was moved to Florida in 1945
- Fripp, Nellie Hassell. *Bluffton and the Oakatie*. Beaufort: Beaufort Historical Society, 1951. Page 10-11.

## 1949: BLUFFTON TELEPHONE COMPANY

- The Hargray Company has been around for 70 years
- Provided Bluffton with phones and connections since 1949
- Established in Hardeeville, South Carolina, as a family-owned and operated business called Harcan Telephone
- “Company History.” Hargray Communications. Accessed October 11, 2023. <https://www.hargray.com/about-hargray/company-history#:~:text=Hargray%20was%20established%20in%20Hardeeville,Hilton%20Head%20Island%20by%201958>.
- “Bluffton Telephone Company, Inc.” Buzzfile. Accessed October 12, 2023. <https://www.buzzfile.com/business/Bluffton-Telephone-Company,-Inc.-843-757-2211>.
- Steiner, Fred. “Forgotten Bluffton: When Did the Telephone Arrive Here?” Bluffton Icon, April 18, 2021. <https://www.blufftonicon.com/news/2021/04/18/forgotten-bluffton-when-did-telephone-arrive-here>.



#### 1956: JAMES F. BYRNES BRIDGE COMPLETED

- A two-lane toll swing bridge was constructed at a cost of \$1.5 million as the first bridge to connect Bluffton to Hilton Head Island. This opened the island to automobile traffic from the mainland
- The year of its opening, forty-eight thousand cars traveled across the bridge, and the toll was discontinued in December 1959
- Due to the bridge, communication was a lot easier, and people could move back and forth
- Bluffton became a commercial town once again, but this time due to cars and trucks rather than boats
- The bridge today is deteriorating, but safe to use for the moment. There are things in the works to either update or replace it
- By 1950s with the development of Hilton Head, building the Talmadge Bridge, and the bridging of the Mackey and Skull Creeks, Bluffton was able to prosper again
- “Bridging the Gap.” Hilton Head Monthly, August 29, 2017. <https://www.hiltonheadmonthly.com/news/hilton-head/4554-bridging-the-gap>.
- Trutor, Clayton. “The Iconic Bridges of Hilton Head.” LOCAL Life | Hilton Head Island & Bluffton. Accessed October 11, 2023. <https://www.locallifesc.com/the-iconic-bridges-of-hilton-head/>.

#### 1965: DESEGREGATION OF BLUFFTON HIGH SCHOOL

- At first, all the Hilton Head kids traveled to Bluffton to school -- M.C. Riley for African Americans and Bluffton High for Whites. With integration in 1970, they went to the same school, H.E. McCracken High School, located in what is now the Bluffton Town Hall. In 1983, they were all sent to the new Hilton Head Island High, before Bluffton got its own new high school in 2004. From then on, they were Bobcats and Seahawks, not Bulldogs.
- Rowland and Craig Washington were the first to integrate Beaufort County schools about a decade after the U.S. Supreme Court declared segregated public schools unconstitutional.
- Morris Campbell was the first African American to go to Bluffton High School in 1965
- He had to work much harder academically in order to prove himself and get the same grades
- He became a member of the honor society: the Beta Club (nominated by Diane Pooler, White student)
- They denied him at first, but another teacher intervened, and he was accepted
- He was an athlete and says that definitely helped people to accept him
- He did face verbal abuse, never physical, and always out of sight of teachers

- He was assaulted when he went to an away game and a “lynch mob” formed when he got on the bus to leave
- After the game, a restaurant wouldn’t serve him, so his coach and teammates left the restaurant (the coach’s response was: can’t serve one, won’t serve any)
- His younger brother, Craig, desegregated Beaufort Elementary – on his first day, he was punched and received heavy verbal abuse
- The Bluffton High School is now Town Hall
- Lauderdale, David. “Lauderdale: Reunion of Bluffton High Schools Finally Anchors a Generation.” *The Island Packet*, 2015. <https://www.islandpacket.com/opinion/opn-columns-blogs/david-lauderdale/article34369446.html>.
- Mccann, Josh. “Brothers Made History in 1964 as First Black Students at Beaufort High.” *The Beaufort Gazette*, January 14, 2011. <https://www.islandpacket.com/news/local/community/beaufort-news/article33404373.html>.
- “Hilton Head Island History.” Town of Hilton Head Island. Accessed October 11, 2023. <https://hiltonheadisland360-40.org/history/#:~:text=The%20J.,Hilton%20Head%20to%20the%20mainland.&text=1955%20%2D%20Beaufort%20County%20state%20representative,Crest%20Motel%20on%20Forest%20Beach>.
- Kelsey, Anne. “At Their Own Deliberate Speed: The Desegregation of the Public Schools in Beaufort County, South Carolina,” 2010.

## 07

## COMMERICAL GROWTH &amp; DEVELOPMENT

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*In Bluffton, keeping up with the Joneses has become part of our state of mind. It's time to see the Heart of the Lowcountry experience a romance with economic expansion and progress.*

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## 1926: VARN FAMILY PURCHASES PALMETTO BLUFF

- After successful cattle operations in Mexico, the Varn family bought Palmetto Bluff
- Later, they turned to turpentine production
- A turpentine still was built on the May River
- The property had previously been a summer home of New York Banker, Richard T. Wilson Jr., who built a mansion there
- Kennedy, Patricia Richards. *A History of Palmetto Bluff*. Bluffton: Palmetto Bluff, 2005.

## 1937: UNION BAG COMPANY PURCHASES PALMETTO BLUFF

- The previous owners of the property were Richard Wilson and Varn Cattle and Turpentine Company, respectively
- The 20,000 acre tract of land was on the south bank of the May River - across from Old Town Bluffton
- Began “a conservation-based land use plan,” which the current owners continue to uphold
- Palmetto Bluff was a hunting retreat until purchased by Crescent Communities in 2000
- Developed by Hart Howerton Planning Firm and Historic Concepts Architecture Firm in 2006
- Purchased by South Street Partners and Henderson Park Capital Partners in 2021 - including the Montage Resort
- “Developers acquire Bluffton's Palmetto Bluff community.” *Bluffton Today* (Bluffton, SC), Jun. 11, 2021. <https://www.blufftontoday.com/story/news/2021/06/11/developers-acquireblufftons-palmetto-bluff-community/7657709002/>
- Wise, Warren L. “Developers acquire 20,000-acre Palmetto Bluff resort property near HiltonHead Island.” *The Post and Courier*. (Charleston, SC), Jun. 10, 2021. [https://www.postandcourier.com/business/real\\_estate/developers-acquire-20-000-acre-palmetto-bluff-resort-property-near-hilton-head-island/article\\_fd88cbd2-c979-11eb-b644-9f57abcf072.html](https://www.postandcourier.com/business/real_estate/developers-acquire-20-000-acre-palmetto-bluff-resort-property-near-hilton-head-island/article_fd88cbd2-c979-11eb-b644-9f57abcf072.html).

#### 1937: OLD MUSK HOUSE IN OPERATION

- The Old Musk House was used to process and dry out deer tongue leaves
- Deer tongue could be used in perfumes or tobacco products
- Operated from 1945-1970
- Then, the building stood vacant until 1983, when it was moved from its original location on Calhoun Street to 1257 May River Road
- Joel Bailey is responsible for moving the building to his property in 1983
- Again, Roberts Vaux moved the building to its current site at 1257 May River Road
- Guscio, Babbie. “Fond Memories Live Inside the Deer Tongue Building.” *The Island Packet* (Bluffton, SC), Feb. 19, 2013. <https://www.islandpacket.com/news/local/news-columns-blogs/article33500943.html>.
- Structure was renovated and became Pepper’s Porch Restaurant from 1996-2014
- Currently owned by Billy Watterson – who demolished some surrounding structures and is currently awaiting new construction
- Re:Purpose Savannah deconstructed the building which will be rebuilt with the intention of turning it into a Gullah Museum
- Hartdegen, Rachel. “Relocation, Partial Demolition Planned for Former Pepper’s Porch Restaurant.” *Bluffton Today*. (Bluffton, SC), Feb. 18, 2022. <https://www.blufftontoday.com/story/news/2022/02/18/relocation-partial-demolition-planned-former-peppers-porch-restaurant/6811409001/>.

#### 1946: THE “CUT RATE” OPENED

- The Rate was built in an effort to provide Bluffton with a real “major grocery store” by Gaillard Heyward and his wife, Lucille, on their property
- Around this time, there were eight general stores, but none were considered a proper grocery store
- Prior to this, the closest grocery store was the Bargain Corner Grocery Store in Savannah (at the corner of Bay and Jefferson St.) and was considered “a day trip”
- Built at 45 Bridge Street
- Exclusively sold Sealtest Ice Cream and had a sign painted on the side with its logo
- The building became the Post Office on Veterans Day, November 11, 1955 - and was considered “a hang-out place” for the town
- Post office moved out in 1965
- As of 2019, the Rate is owned by Debbie Wunder, who restored the structure
- Today, it is a contributing building in the National Register Historic District

- Livingston, Wade. “A CA Woman with Hilton Head Ties has Plans for Bluffton Historic Building, ‘The Rate.’” *The Island Packet* (Bluffton, SC), Jan 23, 2019. <https://www.islandpacket.com/news/business/real-estate-news/article224894095.html>.
- Hunt, Dan. “Restoring the Rate.” *Bluffton Today* (Bluffton, SC), Feb. 11, 2019. <https://www.blufftontoday.com/story/news/2019/02/11/former-hilton-head-resident-plans-to-restore-rate/6027593007/>

#### 1956: SEA PINES PLANTATION BEGUN

- Charles E. Fraser began developing Sea Pines Plantation on Hilton Head Island
- First deed to a lot was sold in 1956 for \$5,350, which was on the beach
- *Coastal Discovery Museum. Images of America: Hilton Head Island. Edited by Natlie Hefter. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 1998.*

#### 1957: BLUFFTON HEALTH CENTER

- The Bluffton Health Center was first constructed in 1957 with an addition in 1967
- Stands as one of the few examples of the International Style of commercial buildings in Bluffton – along with the post office
- Located at 1261 May River Road
- Today, it is called the Jennie Kitty Municipal Building – after the town’s first Black LPN – and serves as the office for Bluffton’s Watershed Management Division
- “Bluffton Names Two Buildings ‘Contributing Resources’ to Historic District.” *Bluffton Today* (Bluffton, SC), May 20, 2022. <https://www.blufftontoday.com/story/news/2022/05/20/bluffton-names-two-buildings-contributing-resources/9796350002/>.

#### 1965: FIRST PURPOSE BUILT POST OFFICE

- Located at 41 Bridge Street
- Construction begun in 1964 and concluded the following year
- The building was dedicated May 16, 1965
- It was Bluffton’s first purpose built post office and replaced the post office at the Rate
- The post office was built by Lucille Heyward, who was the town’s postmistress
- It cost \$10,480 to build – and Heyward charged rent of \$1,248 annually to the post office Department
- The post office moved again in 1988
- Still, it continued to me a place of civic meeting for Blufftonians like the Rate had been

- “Bluffton Names Two Buildings ‘Contributing Resources’ to Historic District.” *Bluffton Today* (Bluffton, SC), May 20, 2022.  
<https://www.blufftontoday.com/story/news/2022/05/20/bluffton-names-two-buildings-contributing-resources/9796350002/>.

#### 1970: ISLAND PACKET NEWSPAPER FIRST PUBLISHED

- Real Estate Developer, Tom Wamsley, Foreign Service Officers, Ralph Hilton, and others funded the project
- Also, Jonathan Daniels, editor emeritus of Raleigh News and Observer, and wife Lucy helped to fund the initial publication as well as committing to writing a weekly column
- The first edition was published on July 9 and was 20 pages
- After that, it was released every Thursday afternoon
- Later, McCathy Newspapers purchased the Island Packet in 1990
- “About Us.” *Island Packet*. Accessed October 6, 2023.  
<https://www.islandpacket.com/customer-service/about-us/>

## 08

## ANNEXATION &amp; REVITALIZATION

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*From one square mile to fifty-four - as Bluffton grows, so too does its heart. Follow the love story of Bluffton's unique series of villages.*

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**1987: REVES PROPERTY ANNEXED**

- First annexation of this era was the incorporation of the Reves Property, which lies east of Old Town
- **Town of Bluffton, MKSK, Kimley Horn, Sottile and Sottile, and Thomas and Hudson. Bluffton Blueprint: Comprehensive Plan. Bluffton: Town of Bluffton, 2022.**

**1993: SUN CITY BEGAN**

- Del Webb Corporation purchased land outside of Bluffton for 5,100 acre retirement community
- Along with pressures from Hilton Head, Sun City was a large driver toward the Annexation of Palmetto Bluff
- **Coastal Discovery Museum. Images of America: Hilton Head Island. Edited by Natlie Hefter. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 1998.**

**1996: BLUFFTON NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT**

- Jennifer D. Brown of Athens, GA submitted the nomination form for the Bluffton Historic District to the SC SHPO on March 1, 1995
- The district was added to the registry on June 21, 1996
- The district was nominated under Criterion A & C
- Boundaries encompass most of Old Town from May River to May River Road and Huger Cove to Bridge Street
- 38 contributing resources were identified
- Nomination was aided by a historic resource survey undertaken by the town in the summer of 1994
- **Brown, Jennifer D. Bluffton Historic District. National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1995.**

- Town of Bluffton, MKSK, Kimley Horn, Sottile and Sottile, and Thomas and Hudson. Bluffton Blueprint: Comprehensive Plan. Bluffton: Town of Bluffton, 2022.

#### 1998: PALMETTO BLUFF ANNEXED

- Largest annexation in Bluffton history
- Lots of local politics involved between Union Camp, Bluffton residents, Town Council, and the County Planning Commission
- Town of Bluffton, MKSK, Kimley Horn, Sottile and Sottile, and Thomas and Hudson. Bluffton Blueprint: Comprehensive Plan. Bluffton: Town of Bluffton, 2022.
- Rich, Motoko. “Bluffton's Planned Annexation Makes Neighbors Very Nervous.” *The Wall Street Journal* (New York, NY), Mar. 11, 1998). <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB8895542139693000>.

#### 2000: BUCKWALTER TRACT, JONES ESTATE, AND BLUFFTON VILLAGE ANNEXED

- These properties constitute some of the largest parcels annexed into Bluffton
- Buckwalter Place Planned Unit Development Plan adopted as commercial/mixed-use node with retail space, grocery stores, parks, and an outdoor amphitheater
- Apartments and townhomes were part of the plan
- Buckwalter Place Commerce Park Master Plan approved in 2019
- Town of Bluffton, MKSK, Kimley Horn, Sottile and Sottile, and Thomas and Hudson. Bluffton Blueprint: Comprehensive Plan. Bluffton: Town of Bluffton, 2022.

#### 2005: BUCK ISLAND SIMMONSVILLE ANNEXED

- The neighborhood is located approximately one mile from Old Town
- An election to annex the neighborhood was held on October 26, 2005 following a petition from residents
- The majority voted in favor, and around 500 parcels were annexed into the town on December 29, 2005
- Town of Bluffton. *Buck Island Simmonsville Neighborhood Plan*. Bluffton, Town of Bluffton, 2005.



## 09

## THE NEW MILLENIUM &amp; LOOKING FORWARD

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*The vision is clear, and our path forward is hopeful. While Bluffton shares an affection for the past, we to continue to write our love letter for the future.*

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**2000: BLUFFTON COVENANT DRAFTED**

- The Bluffton Covenant was included in a visioning document entitled, *The Bluffton State of Mind: Defining and Defending the Character of Bluffton*
- **Town of Bluffton, MKSK, Kimley Horn, Sottile and Sottile, and Thomas and Hudson. Bluffton Blueprint: Comprehensive Plan. Bluffton: Town of Bluffton, 2022.**

**2003: PALMETTO BLUFF CONSERVANCY ESTABLISHED**

- Goal of preserving the natural environment and ecosystem of maritime forests and marshland in Palmetto Bluff
- Encompasses 32 miles of continuous riverfront
- **Kennedy, Patricia Richards. A History of Palmetto Bluff. Bluffton: Palmetto Bluff, 2005.**

**2005: BLUFFTON DESIGNATED AS A PRESERVE AMERICA COMMUNITY**

- Part of a designation program to recognize and preserve communities with notable heritage for community revitalization and economic development
- An initiative overseen by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
- **“Historic District.” *Town of Bluffton*. Accessed October 17, 2023. <https://www.townofbluffton.sc.gov/406/Historic-District>.**
- **“Preserve America.” *Advisory Council on Historic Preservation*. Accessed October 17, 2023. <https://www.achp.gov/preserve-america>.**

**2005: SC 46 DESIGNATED AS A NATIONAL SCENIC HIGHWAY**

- In 1987, SC 46, also known as May River Road in Bluffton, was designated as a SC scenic highway from the Jasper County Line to Highway 278

- The, in 2005, the Town of Bluffton hired the firm, We Make Things Happen Corporation, to propose a corridor management plan for SC 46 and apply for national designation
- *We Make Things Happen. Corridor Management Plan for SC 46. Bluffton: Town of Bluffton, 2005.*

#### 2006: OLD TOWN MASTER PLAN ADOPTED

- Goal of shaping future development in Old Town to retain natural and architectural character
- Involved public participation strategies of charettes and study tours
- Principles included: “Preserve and Protect Your Legacy, Foster Connectedness in All Things, Nurture Your Memorable Streets”
- Also outlined basis for aesthetic guidelines that have become part of the current design review process
- *Dover, Kohl, and Partners. Old Town Masterplan. Bluffton: Town of Bluffton, 2006.*

#### 2006: GULLAH GEECHEE CULTURAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR NOMINATED

- Extends from North Carolina to Florida – much of it forms the Lowcountry, including Bluffton
- Designated during October 2006 as part of the National Heritage Areas Act of 2006
- *“Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor.” National Park Service. Accessed October 7, 2023. <https://www.nps.gov/places/gullah-geechee-cultural-heritage-corridor.htm>.*

#### 2007: OLD TOWN BLUFFTON HISTORIC DISTRICT

- District was established by Town Council on June 19, 2007
- The designation adopted many recommendations from the Old Town Master Plan to enact standards for design review
- Along with the district overlay, the accompanying preservation ordinance allows for the designation of historic resources that contribute to the district, as well as establishing rehabilitation, modification, and demotion standards
- A 2001 historic resource survey aided in the designation of the district
- A third resource survey was conducted in 2008 – from this survey 88 contributing resources were identified, of which 86 were added to the district
- Since then, the Bluffton Post Office and Bluffton Health Center were added to the district on May 10, 2022
- *Town of Bluffton, MKSK, Kimley Horn, Sottile and Sottile, and Thomas and Hudson. Bluffton Blueprint: Comprehensive Plan. Bluffton: Town of Bluffton, 2022.*

**2015: HISPANIC MINORITY**

- Hispanic population identified as the largest minority in Bluffton
- 2,616 individuals or 18.7% of Blufftonians identify as Hispanic opposed to the 17.4% who identify as Black, which was previously the largest minority
- High, Lucas. “Hispanics Become Bluffton’s Largest Minority Group.” *The State* (Columbia, SC), Dec. 20, 2015. <https://www.thestate.com/news/local/article50780225.html>.

**2016: BLUFFTON DESIGNATED AS CULTURAL DISTRICT**

- District extends N/S from Bluffton Village to the May River and E/W from Burnt Church Road to Cahill’s Market
- Was the sixth community to be designated by the SC Arts Commission
- “Cultural District.” *Town of Bluffton*. Accessed October 7, 2023. [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vmwodk7Iha\\_LvOebiUjYOkitBDWbm61b4L8V7vY4Q/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vmwodk7Iha_LvOebiUjYOkitBDWbm61b4L8V7vY4Q/edit).

**2019: RECONSTRUCTION ERA NATIONAL HISTORIC NETWORK ESTABLISHED**

- Part of this network includes Bluffton’s Garvin-Garvey House and the Campbell AME Chapel
- Created by The John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act on March 12
- “The Reconstruction Era National Historic Network.” *National Park Service*. Accessed October 7, 2023. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/reconstruction/network.htm>.

**TODAY: BLUFFTON’S ECOSYSTEM**

- Oyster beds thrive in the brackish water of the May River
- These were essential to early human habitation in the area as the surrounding marshes also act as filters to clean the water in the river as well as offering home to many other species
- The marshes also mitigate the effects of erosion and the damage from storm surges
- Climate in Bluffton is humid subtropical
- Hot summers, mild winters
- Average temperatures are 57-77 degrees Fahrenheit based on data from South Carolina State Climatology office between 1991-2020

- 49 inches of rain annually on average
- Main watersheds in Bluffton: New River Watershed (67,697 acres), Okatie/Colleton River Watershed (15,744), and the May River Watershed (25,582 acres)
- May River is comprised of oyster bars, inter-tidal marshes, small and large tidal creeks, and shallow bays or mud flats
- 30% of oysters consumed in SC come from May River according to “Environmental and Ecological Assessment of the May River”
- Bluffton Oyster Factory, on May River, continues to operate as the oldest oyster shucking facility in SC and was recognized in 1999 as tenth oldest business in the state
- New River is the boundary between Beaufort and Jasper counties and empties into Atlantic Ocean
- New River has a much lower water quality than May River - high mercury and fecal content
- Okatie/Colleton Rivers is composed of narrow tidal creeks and have one of the highest tidal fluctuations in the southeast
- The Okatie and Colleton Rivers were historically known for its shellfish harvesting
- Several invasive/exotic species may pose potential threats to existing ecosystem such as: the Zebra mussel, Japanese Climbing Fern, Wisteria, Kudzu, Ligustrum, and the Tallow Tree.
- **Town of Bluffton, MKSK, Kimley Horn, Sottile and Sottile, and Thomas and Hudson. Bluffton Blueprint: Comprehensive Plan. Bluffton: Town of Bluffton, 2022.**

**PART II**

FOLLOW THE HEART THROUGH STORIES

## 01

## BLUFFTONIAN NARRATIVES

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*Our love letter has documented the passage of time in Bluffton. Now, its stories are realized through the people who lived it.*

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**FOUNDING OF THE CAMPBELL AME CHAPEL IN 1872**

- The building was purchased by nine freedmen
- These people are: The nine freed slaves were Renty Fields, Jacob Chisolm, William Ferguson, Jeffrey Buncomb, William Smith (or Smiley), David Heyward, Christopher Bryan, Theodore Wilson, and William Lightburn
- Not much is known about these nine freedmen, but some things have been uncovered:
- William Ferguson opened a bank account in 1870
- Renty Fields opened an account in 1873
- Jacob Chisolm was a farmer. He owned his house, but could not read or write
- David Heyward was also a farmer and could neither read nor write. In 1870 he did have a personal estate valued at \$350.00
- They expanded the church, giving it new siding and bell, making it their own
- Sunday schools became important for literacy as it was the only place they could really learn
- Minutes of the South Carolina Annual Conferences of the AME Church from 1875 and later testify to an increase in Sunday School attendance in Bluffton, specifically Campbell Chapel, leading to more teachers, sessions, and books in the church library.
- 1880 U.S. Census notes that Jacob Chisolm's twelve-year-old granddaughter worked on Jacob's farm and did not attend school. She was literate though due to her education through the Campbell AME Chapel
- Many current congregation members trace their ancestry back to two of the original Campbell Chapel AME trustees: Jacob Chisolm and William Lightburn. Though documentation has not yet surfaced for William Lightburn, the descendants of Jack Lightburn believe that William and Jack were brothers.
- **“A.M.E Historic Chapel.” Discover Lowcountry. Accessed November 2, 2023. <https://www.discoverlowcountry.com/copy-of-bluffton-movement>.**

**ROSIE BERDYCH:**

- She was seven years old when Lewis Wickes Hine photographed her in 1913
- She was in her second year of shucking oysters at the Bluffton Varn and Platt Canning Co.
- She was illiterate and not in school
- She was also a migrant worker
- The photograph Hine took was part of a series documenting child labor for the National Child Labor Committee
- The photos were submitted into the public record and helped to enact child labor laws in the 1920s
- Kaufman, Berry. “Unknown Stories of Bluffton: Rosie: How Bluffton Reshaped Child-Labor Laws.” LOCAL Life | Hilton Head Island & Bluffton. Accessed November 2, 2023. <https://www.locallifesc.com/unknown-stories-of-bluffton-rosie-how-bluffton-reshaped-child-labor-laws/>.
- Hine’s original caption read: "7-year-old Rosie. Regular oyster shucker. Her second year at it. Illiterate. Works all day. Shucks only a few pots a day. (Showing process) Varn & Platt Canning Co."
- Rosie’s daughter has said: “She used to talk about when she was young, and they traveled from Baltimore to South Carolina and then back to Baltimore to pick fruits and vegetables. I know that she grew up in Baltimore. They were poor, and they lived in a tenement house. She never talked about going to school. We always wondered how she learned to read and write."
- Wallace, Vaughn. “Tracking Down Lewis Hine’s Forgotten Child Laborers.” Time, November 27, 2013. <https://time.com/3805208/tracking-down-lewis-hines-forgotten-child-laborers/>.
- Hine returned three years after photographing Rosie and photographed her again
- In these second photos, she is neat and clean. She is dressed up for school.
- She had three siblings and her parents' names were Mike and Marine
- She was born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1905
- Manning, Joe. “Rose Berdych, Bluffton, South Carolina.” Mornings on Maple Street, 2011. <https://morningsonmaplestreet.com/2015/01/18/rose-berdych/>.

**FATHER NATHANAEL PEEPLES:**

- Grew up in Bluffton
- One of fourteen siblings – eleven other brothers named after the apostles
- Served as rector of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Savannah

- In 1943, he and a group of men took vows and established an episcopal monastery (the first of its kind in SC) on Good Shepherd Island (also known as Devil’s Elbow and Potato Island)
- The island was roughly 50 acres and provided land for the monks to run a self-sustaining commune
- As a monk, Peeples wore white hooded robes with a triple knotted cord sash
- Peeples’ niece, Jeanne Saussy Wright, wrote that Bluffton “found their [the monks] presence to be calming in these turbulent times of war”
- In 1950, Peeples and the monks moved the monastery to Florida
- After the monks left Good Shepherd Island, the new owners turned the oratory into a private residence
- Sometime before his death in 1973, Peeples returned to Bluffton
- **Shaw-Roldán, Michele.** “Good Shepherd: Island of “Prayer without Ceasing” in the May.” *The Bluffton Breeze*, March 2014. <https://issuu.com/blufftonbreeze/docs/bluffton-breeze-mar-2014>.
- The order of Good Shepherd Island was silent, and the monks used bells for communication
- Peeples’ brother Luke was a locally famous musician and lived on Calhoun Street
- Peeples was reportedly very shy and sought the privacy of the island monastery
- According to stories, Peeples was very territorial about the island and disliked visitors who came to shrimp in the adjacent creek
- **Harrell, Annelore.** “Mystery Surrounds Father Peeples.” *Bluffton Today* (Bluffton, SC), Jul. 19, 2011. <https://www.blufftontoday.com/story/opinion/2011/07/19/mystery-surrounds-father-peeples/14056586007/>.

#### **MORRIS CAMPBELL:**

- Born in October 1951
- The first African American to choose to attend Bluffton High School in 1965, and member of the Beta Club honor society
- Became an athlete which he says helped people to accept him, but still experienced verbal abuse and heavy discrimination all around
- Worked to help further integration efforts
- **Kelsey, Anne Lufkin.** 2010. “At Their Own Deliberate Speed: The Desegregation of the Public Schools in Beaufort County, South Carolina.” *All Theses* 856 (May). [https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1856&context=all\\_theses](https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1856&context=all_theses).
- Had strong interests in community building and services for Beaufort County
- Began his tenure at the county as an elected official during two terms on County Council from 1981 to 1984



- Became director of voter registration and elections in 1986 and deputy administrator for human services in 1991
- Led Beaufort's Community Services division from 1993 until his retirement in 2015
- Self-described as, "hardheaded," and, "opinionated"
- "One thing about Morris is it didn't matter who you work for, it's what you work for," said Washington, former chairman of the county Board of Education. "If you had a common interest, he tried to bring you to the table."
- **Hilton Head Island Packet. 2015. "Long-Time County Public Servant Morris Campbell to Retire," June 23, 2015. <https://www.islandpacket.com/news/politics-government/article33693573.html>.**

#### **MARY ELIZABETH GRAVES:**

- Born in 1921 in Bluffton
- Descended from George Guilford, a union soldier from Maine stationed on Hilton Head Island during the Civil War
- Her grandfather, George Sewell Guilford, was Bluffton's first Mayor
- Graves was one of eight children to John Samuel "Sam" Graves and Cora Jane Guildford
- Her parents owned a store and a bank on Calhoun Street – the family lived in an apartment over the store
- Later, the family moved into the Graves House on Calhoun Street, which was completed in 1915
- The Graves and Peeples families were close and cousins through marriage
- Growing up, Graves was reportedly very athletic and loved to swim in the river
- Graves graduated from high school in 1938
- After attending the 1939 World's Fair in New York, Graves attended Winthrop College earning a degree in physical education
- Later, Graves enrolled in physical therapy courses at White Sulphur Springs, WV and Galesburg, IL
- Graves became a Second Lieutenant in the Army and served in the Philippines and Okinawa
- Graves was discharged as a Captain in 1956
- Later, Graves worked for the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis as a physical therapist
- After pursuing further education at New York University, in 1970, Graves started her own practice in Charlotte – Graves and Depuy Physical Therapists, Inc.
- Graves retired in 1982 and returned to Bluffton
- In her final years, Graves became an activist for public rights of way in the town

- Marscher, Fran Heyward. *More Stories from Hilton Head, Bluffton, and Daufuskie. Vol II, Remembering the Way It Was*. Charleston: The History Press, 2007.

**02****BLUFFTONIAN LETTERS**

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*Finally, a centuries-long romance is punctuated with love letters from Blufftonians today, who hold a deep appreciation for the stories that need to be shared.*

---

**NATE PRINGLE**

**CAROLYN COPPOLA**

**JON BLACK**

**JOAN HEYWARD**

**JOHN O'TOOLE**

**DEAN TURNER**

**RENTY KITTY**

## CONCLUSION

Through the research conducted as part of the proposal for a Welcome Center at the Squire Pope Carriage House, narratives have emerged that embellish a romance with the Town of Bluffton. While much of the content presented in this document may be later developed for exhibits and displays, many areas for further exploration remain. Beginning with recommendations for interviews as part of a future oral history program, several community stakeholders have been identified:

- Nate Pringle – local historian
- Carolyn Coppola – historic preservation consultant
- Jon Black – Pastor of the Campbell AME Chapel
- Joan Heyward – steward of the Caldwell Archives
- John O’Toole – Executive Director of the Beaufort County Economic Development Corp.
- Dean Turner – Director of the Bluffton Rotary Club
- Renty Kitty – son of Jennie Kitty.

In addition, further research is recommended in regard to personal narratives in Bluffton. For example, little resources are currently available for the Campbell Nine – the freedmen who purchased the Old Bluffton Methodist Church in 1872. Moreover, historic photographs and maps should be identified for the following areas:

- Photographs for Personal Narratives
- Historic Maps of Bluffton area from 1750-1900
- Historic Photographs of the Bluffton Health Center and the Post Office.

Finally, this research would not have been possible without the assistance and support of Glen Umberger, Historic Preservationist, and Debbie Szpanka, Director of Communications and Community Outreach, as well as the entire Town of Bluffton Staff. Furthermore, much thanks are due to Carolyn Coppola for her review and feedback of this research and the librarians at the Bluffton Public Library for their help in identifying source material. Lastly, Professor Sabrina

Cox is responsible to ensuring the success of this project for her guidance and expertise throughout the process. Working towards supporting the love story of present and future Blufftonians, it is the hope of this project team that their story will continue to endure through this ongoing love letter.

## FIGURES



*Figure 1*

Hubbard & Mix, photographer. *Negro quarters, T.J. Fripp plantation, Near Beaufort, S.C.* South Carolina United States, 1863. [United States: Publisher not identified, between -June 1866] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2015646743/>.



*Figure 2*

The Fripp House c.1830, Unknown. Photograph, unknown dimensions. From The Bluffton Historical Preservation Society Archives “A Tour of Bluffton’s Antebellum Homes,” <https://www.bluffton.com/tour-blufftons-antebellum-homes/>.



*Figure 3*

7-year-old Rosie. Regular oyster shucker. Her second year at it. Illiterate. Works all day. Shucks only a few pots a day. (Showing process) Varn & Platt Canning Co. Location: Bluffton, South Carolina, 1913, Lewis Wickes Hine. Photograph, unknown dimensions. *Library of Congress*.



*Figure 4*

Sam Bennet, a long time Bluffton oyster picker, now retired, unknown date, Burrell, Victor G. Photograph, unknown dimensions. *South Carolina Oyster Industry: A History*. V. G. Burrell Publisher (Charleston, SC), 2003.



*Figure 5*

Oyster eating gets right serious at an event in Bluffton in 2000, 2000, Burrell, Victor G. Photograph, unknown dimensions. *South Carolina Oyster Industry: A History*. V. G. Burrell Publisher (Charleston, SC), 2003.





*Figure 6*

Anthony Frasier unloading at the Bluffton Oyster Company dock, 1999, Burrell, Victor G. Photograph, unknown dimensions. *South Carolina Oyster Industry: A History*. V. G. Burrell Publisher (Charleston, SC), 2003.



*Figure 7*

Mr. and Mrs. Larry Toomer resting after a hard day at the oyster company, unknown date, Burrell, Victor G. Photograph, unknown dimensions. *South Carolina Oyster Industry: A History*. V. G. Burrell Publisher (Charleston, SC), 2003.



*Figure 8*

Oysters to be shucked at Bluffton. Each picker's harvest is kept separate, and he is paid by the yield, 1999, Burrell, Victor G. Photograph, unknown dimensions. *South Carolina Oyster Industry: A History*. V. G. Burrell Publisher (Charleston, SC), 2003.



*Figure 9*

The Bluffton Oyster Company in the historic district of Bluffton, SC., unknown, Bill Fitzpatrick. *Wikimedia Commons*. June 13, 2012.



*Figure 10*

Lucille Heyward at The Rate, 1946, Unknown. Photograph, unknown dimensions. From Livingston Wade's "A CA Woman with Hilton Head Ties has Plans for Bluffton Historic Building, 'The Rate.'" *The Island Packet* (Bluffton, SC), Jan 23, 2019.



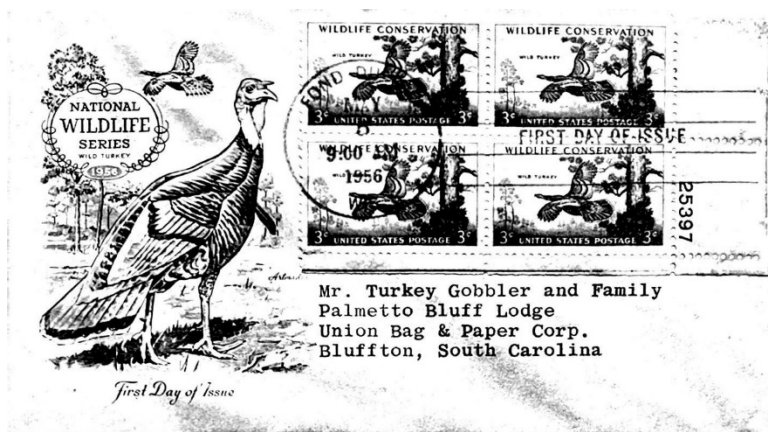
*Figure 11*

The Rate, 1946, Unknown. Photograph, Unknown Dimensions. From Livingston Wade's "A CA Woman with Hilton Head Ties has Plans for Bluffton Historic Building, 'The Rate.'" *The Island Packet* (Bluffton, SC), Jan 23, 2019.



*Figure 12*

Turpentine Still at Palmetto Bluff, Unknown Date, Unknown, Unknown Dimensions. From Patricia Richards Kennedy's *A History of Palmetto Bluff*. Bluffton: Palmetto Bluff, 2005.



This is the first stamp of three of an issue honoring and sponsoring wildlife conservation. In view of the selection of the wild turkey as the first subject in the series I thought naturally of the Gobbler family's real home at the Bluff.

The two other stamps to be issued later this year will feature the pronghorn antelope and the king salmon.

May 5th, 1956

*Roger*  
R. E. Pettit

*Figure 13*

Postcard from Palmetto Bluff in Union Bag Era, 1956, Unknown, Unknown Dimensions. From Patricia Richards Kennedy's *A History of Palmetto Bluff*. Bluffton: Palmetto Bluff, 2005.



I heard or seemed to hear the chiding Sea  
Say, Pilgrim, why so late and slow to come?  
-- Emerson

# THE ISLAND PACKET



Fifteen cents per copy  
Volume 1 Number 1  
Thursday, July 9, 1970  
Hilton Head Island, South Carolina 29928

## SOJOURNERS' SCRAPBOOK

### Swinging On The Grapevine

By Jonathan Daniels

The grapevine grows, and it has blossomed that Robin Hilton and Tom Wainstay have moved their 45 frequent and numbered visitors to Hilton Head, to swing upon it every now and then.

The ever-growing vine commensurate with the island's growth has moved fast and forward on this island. Certainly the grapevine did not suffer as a result of spreading the news back in the 1940s, old days. In the great hurricanes of 1933 hundreds in the island's environs were damaged who had not treatment they were in danger. It was never been quite that fast in the memory of present islanders. Radio and TV make it possible for them to know everything that is happening in the world but practically nothing about what is going on on Hilton Head.

A decade ago the new pioneers were not entirely dependent on the grapevine. But when they began to swing on the grapevine, the island's communication was limited. I don't remember how it was at first. Royal Plantation and on Fern's Point, but in the Pine the phone lines can reach only as far as the Beach Lagoon Road. Where Palmetto Dunes now grows, communication was only by word of mouth, or by mail, or by the island's limited phone service. Signals at a high level, under Hilton and Larry Lopez will now be in the 715.30, which is not a bad service. Helen Brooks and a couple of other ladies have given us more frequent reports.

Still the other side my neighbor One Rogers had a lot of news to tell. I asked him where to head to, in the distant chair, he said, "Litchfield St. The list may provide a good news service and tell the cavity of information while he packs in the mailbag. But it might not be necessary to have a mouth full of instruments in (Cont'd on Page 20)

## Home Building Drops 6%

Private home construction on Hilton Head Island dropped approximately six per cent during the first six months of 1970 compared with 1969 figures for the same period, but commercial building showed a sharp drop from \$12,548 in 1969 to \$1,000 in 1970. The largest permit for a home under construction is for a \$10,000 building on Palmetto Dunes.

The steady growth of the island's population which is reflected in nonbuilding activity on all of the island's major developments is also indicated by figures of building sales retained by the Palmetto Electric Cooperative. These sales increased to \$1,693,360 in 1969 from \$1,000,000 the previous year and sales for 1970 are estimated at \$4,253,000 on Hilton Head Island. The sale of 150,700 KW is anticipated for 1971.

A strong picture in the purchase of property for home building has been reported by some island developers since the first of the year. Colonel Charles Hanks, vice president of the Hilton Head Company and sales manager, notes that for the first five months of 1970 the dollar value of sales by his company were 150 per cent above the five-year average and that the same month was the best June the company ever had in such sales.

Land sales have been good in recent months at Sea Pines Plantation, Island Lagoon, vice president in charge of sales, reported, with condominium sales especially good since the first of the year, especially at Harbour Town.

## P. O. RAISED TO FIRST CLASS

The island postoffice was raised to first class status on July 1, its revenue having climbed from \$78,000 to \$100,000 during the first year. The independent office building, located on Pines Ave., services a branch office and Duckington Island.

Mrs. Betty R. Schender, postmaster, cited the new designation as another example of the island's growth. When she became postmaster the years ago she recalled, the postoffice had just been elevated from third class to second.

Philip Probst, Asst. to the postmaster, was the only mail carrier at the time for Hilton Head and Duckington islands. Three carriers are now assigned: Charles Wright, W. H. Harvey, Jr. and Col. (Ret.) J. F. Vander.

The expanded staff now includes Mrs. Peggy Young, Mrs. Margaret Dean, and Mrs. David and Nathan Mistry.

The island Fairfield branch is located on U. S. Highway 78 in the northern part of the island. Wilma Hodges is the branch supervisor.

The island's senior service post clerk is Mrs. Carl Woodring, who is stationed at the main postoffice.

## Population More Than 3,000 Here

While no preliminary 1970 census figures have been released for Hilton Head Island, the most authoritative estimate obtained by this newspaper after telephone calls to census officials at Charleston, Columbia, Myrtle and Washington and talk with county maintenance is between 3,200 and 3,500. The 1960 census of permanent residents was 2,120.

## SEAL STRIKES BACK AT DEVELOPMENT BOARD

A letter charging that the State Development Board is using tax dollars to attack Hilton Head Island for having set the precedent against the island's chemical firm's plan to locate on mainland waters of Beaufort county is going out to property owners and others interested, according to Bruce Hasky, president of South Carolina. Hasky requested a meeting to formulate plans to combat the State Development Board's attacks on Hilton Head Island, which he said is using tax dollars not to defend its rule in bringing BASF to Beaufort county but to take surreptitious action against the island.

The letter lists six actions which it says the island has taken against the island: (1) disrupted marches by non-residents of the county, mostly youngsters who have no concern with local employment; (2) made photographs of the marches and released them to the press; (3) disrupted the island's quiet fourth of July celebration; (4) released inaccurate reports concerning the race as school taxes if BASF is not permitted to build; (5) prepared and distributed a pamphlet denigrating the island; (6) prepared a letterhead and had "Back Me, Four Me" paraphrasing to show how the "Back Me" on Hilton Head degrades the honor of a chance to earn a living; (7) disrupted the island's environmental action, by its answering campaign, the press, but plans to take advertisements to make the full story known and companies instituting a campaign to sue against the State or its agency, said Hasky, to prohibit use of tax money to disrupt the island.

Hasky called on the island's Liberty Club at Harbour Town, reported about the same time.

Hasky said there was a cool breeze on the beach although the water was unusually rough at low tide.

Old-timer Daytona visitors gathered at the College Circle entrance to the beach, made over-viewing use of the new trash containers put up by the Jay

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Arthur F. Mize of the Public Information Office of the Bureau of the Census in Washington said that the preliminary Bluffton census figure (preparation of the report includes Hilton Head Island, Pritchardville and a district increase to 4,700 persons in 1970 from a 1960 figure of 3,125. The Bluffton town figure rises from 330 to 494. Most of the district increase was due to the growth of population on Hilton Head Island.

The count on the island is complicated by the fact that many "visitors" maintain legal residences elsewhere, and that many houses are occupied almost year-round by changing occupants who remain for a few weeks or months and show up only in the visitor's count. The Chamber of Commerce reports during the decade the increase of approximately 300 percent of the island's population in the period the 1970 total to 2,500,000 in the preliminary count) and of Beaufort County's seven percent increase from 44,187 to 46,770. More than 25 percent of the county's rise in population may be attributed to the growth of Hilton Head Island. The increase has been notably sharp during the past five years.

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Figure 14

First Issue of the Island Packet, 1970, Unknown Dimensions. From *The Island Packet* (Bluffton, SC), Jul. 9, 1970.



*Figure 15*

Mary Elizabeth Graves, Unknown Date, Unknown, Unknown Dimensions. From Fran Heyward Marscher's *Remembering the Way It Was Vol II, More Stories from Hilton Head, Bluffton, and Daufuskie*. Charleston: The History Press, 2007.



*Figure 16*

Mary Graves, Unknown Date, Unknown, Unknown Dimensions. From *The Graves House*.  
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**APPENDIX A**  
EXHIBIT DRAFT TEXT



## 03

AN ANTEBELLUM BLUFFTON

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*As a Bluffton society expands outward, the pages grow longer, denser, and more complex. Enchanted words seem to breathe on their own, no longer floating, but dreamily waltzing on the wind.*

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**GULLAH CULTURE**

When enslaved West Africans came to the Lowcountry in the late 1600s, they were made to labor and farm, but the 1863 emancipation proclamation resulted in massive numbers of newly freed people with no real aid in the US to fend for themselves. In South Carolina, this led them to establish independent ‘neighborhoods,’ across Beaufort that mirrored the 10 towns originally established by the Yemassee in the 17th century. This isolation also led to the development of specific and rich Gullah-Geechee language, beliefs, and social practices.

The Gullah influence is palpable, impacting not only arts, spiritual, and societal practices but also South Carolina's growth as a commercial center due to West African expertise in rice farming in the 17th-19th Century. Today, the Gullahs continue to inhabit much of the Southeast, holding tight to their traditional roots within modern society.

**CIVIC DEVELOPMENT**

A mark of Bluffton's rapid growth came when the May River Post Office opened in May 1833. It would be officially renamed the Bluffton Post Office in April 1842 as the town changed name. The town shifted names a few times, from May River to "Kirk's Landing" or "Kirk's Bluff," and finally to Bluffton in the early 1840s.

At the same time, Bluffton continued to develop, introducing the Calhoun Street Dock, built in 1843 and allowing for increased trade and travel between Charleston, Savannah, and Bluffton. Before then, travel from Savannah to Bluffton could take up to eight hours by

stagecoach, and with no passenger railroad connecting the two, bouncing back and forth wasn't feasible. Luckily, the dock made way for boats and allowed travel and imports to become accessible to a quickly growing population.

The landing eventually made way for Bluffton to become a commercial center for Southeastern trading and, in 1852, encouraged an act of the South Carolina General Assembly to incorporate Bluffton for the first time.

1857 brought on the new Church of the Cross, replacing the 1845 chapel, now too small for its growing congregation. Architect E. B. White described his design as a "handsome cruciform Gothic building," and began construction in July 1854. The church was famously one of the few buildings to survive the Burning of Bluffton.

## 05

## TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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*Bluffton: a sight for sore eyes. Picking through the cinders, slowly a few pieces of our love letter reveal themselves.*

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**THE BLUFFTON OYSTER COMPANY**

Being the oldest known oyster shucking house in South Carolina since 1899, the Bluffton Oyster Company embodies Bluffton's traditions and heritage. It was used as a gentlemen's club until 1900 when Clarence "Buster" Martin obtained the deed. During this time, the main employees of oyster factories were Poles, but once slavery was abolished, African Americans joined the oyster factory workforce. By 1919, African Americans became the main employees. Martin sold the Bluffton Oyster Factory in 1930 and from there, it went through several hands: Junior Graves, the Bluffton co-op, Jerry Reeves, Michael Reeves, and Larry and Tina Toomer. Today, the Beaufort County Open Land Trust owns the Company. Larry and Tina Toomer sold it to them in the early 2000s with the stipulation that the Bluffton Oyster Company would continue, allowing Bluffton tradition to thrive. Oyster history and influence is annually celebrated at the Historic Bluffton Arts and Seafood Festival in October.

Traditionally, oysters are collected by men and brought to the women to shuck them. Before labor laws, the Bluffton Oyster Company also gave work to people of all ages. Lewis Wickes Hine, a photographer, visited the Bluffton Oyster Company in 1913 to take pictures of working children. These photos were instrumental in bringing about child labor laws in the 1920s. As the Bluffton Oyster Company grew through the decades, so did the demand. With the use of "inventory control," the Company was able to freeze products to sell in warmer weather. In the late 1990s, the Bluffton Oyster Company began to sell peeler crabs in the spring and hard crabs, shrimp, and finfish in the summer. Walking around Bluffton, you will notice the interesting, white material paved in the sidewalks. These are the shells of oysters shucked before WW2. Oscar Frazier, a Bluffton born poet, wrote a poem describing how oysters have shaped Bluffton, both physically and emotionally. The poem is called "Oyster Days Last Forever."

## COMMERICAL GROWTH &amp; DEVELOPMENT

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*In Bluffton, keeping up with the Joneses has become part of our state of mind. It's time to see the Heart of the Lowcountry experience a romance with economic expansion and progress.*

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**VARN CATTLE AND TURPENTINE AND UNION BAG AT PALMETTO BLUFF**

Although the commercial renaissance of King Cotton, or rather, King Rice, had dwindled following the Civil War, Bluffton saw other avenues for growth and development in the Post-Reconstruction Era. From small-scale retail in Old Town to large real estate deals elsewhere, Bluffton's economic and civic expansion began around the beginning of the twentieth century. Part of this maturation is a result of the chain of ownership at the town's largest region: Palmetto Bluff. Having first been the seat of Richard T. Wilson's hunting estate, the Varn Turpentine and Cattle Company bought the 20,000-acre tract in 1926 following a devastating fire at the property, which destroyed the New York Baron's seventy-two room mansion. After several successful operations in Mexico, the Varn family began raising cattle at Palmetto Bluff. On the land unused for pasturage, turpentine production became a lucrative endeavor that partially supported the economy of the area during the early decades of the century. Here, a still was constructed on the May River to yield large amounts of resinous material. Only several years later, the value of Palmetto Bluff's timber for pulp quickly displaced its use for turpentine. Thus, Union Bag Company established a significant presence in the town after acquiring the property in 1937. However, once timbering assessments of the area began, the company fell in love with the beauty of the Bluff. Shortly after, conservation easements were incorporated into a protective land use plan, which is still upheld by the current owners of Palmetto Bluff today.

## THE CUT RATE

While Palmetto Bluff became a horn of plenty for raw materials and hunting, the rest of Bluffton experienced a shortage in the availability and access to groceries. In the early 1940s, Bargain Corner Grocery Store was the closest option. Located at the corner of Bay and Jefferson Streets in Savannah, a trip for food was considered a “day trip” by Blufftonian locals. Realizing that the town needed its own grocery store, Gaillard Heyward, descended of Declaration signer Thomas Heyward, began construction on a building to house the store in 1946. Completed the following year, the store was colloquially called: The Rate. Although Heyward had intended to sell groceries, the store quickly became popular for its subterranean freezer. Also selling novelties like cigarettes and cosmetics, The Rate has a sign painted on the west side of the building, which read: “Seaslttest.” Flanking each side of this logo, two ice cream cones announced the shop’s most favored treat, and The Rate stood as a sentiment of Bluffton’s mid-century love story. Eight years after its opening, the Post Office replaced The Rate as the building’s tenant on November eleventh. From 1955 until the institution’s move in 1964, Blufftonians continued to regard the building as a “hangout place ... where everybody met.” Standing vacant for over half a century, The Rate building was finally purchased by Debbie Wunder. Outlining intentions to restore the building to its original condition in 1947, Wunder’s plans were quickly approved by the Bluffton Town Council in February of 2019.

**THANK YOU**

