

**Dedication Of Wymberley Oaks**  
**Wymberley Garden Club**  
**May 21, 2005**  
**By Noel Wright**

Thanks for inviting me to speak at this dedication. I just want to reminisce with you today to give you an idea of what our community and Wymberley looked like in 1944 when I first moved to Isle of Hope. I was born in Savannah and often visited Isle of Hope with my family in the 1930's and early 40's. My mother did not want to move out from Savannah because it was "too far out in the country". It was during WW II and gasoline was rationed. We had an allotment of something like 8 gallons per month, which made it difficult to drive back and forth from IOH to Savannah. The house my father was interested in at 3 Bluff Drive was in poor condition and did not have a central heating system. In fact the only heat was provided by the fireplaces located in every room. The ground floor was dirt, as the original pine floor had been eaten by termites. Luckily, my father, who was a lawyer, was persuasive enough to talk mother into moving way out to Isle of Hope

The house and lot were a child's dream. The original lot contained 60 acres and fronted 250 feet on the river. The property extended from the bluff all the way back to the marsh near what is now Cardinal Road. Neither Cornus Drive nor Cardinal Road existed then. The portion of LaRoche Avenue that Cardinal and Cornus dead end into was also not in existence. There were no houses in the back, but I did find several fully operational moonshine stills in the woods.

We purchased only the center 3.5 acres with a river frontage of 150 feet. The lots on either side were unimproved. The house, built in 1848, was a real plantation house situated on 60 acres. When we moved there the grounds contained 2 slave quarters. One of the houses was occupied by an ex slave named Brutus. My father agreed with the seller, Olin McIntosh, Sr., that Brutus could remain in the house as long as he lived. He was quite old, as you can imagine, and lived only about 2 years longer.

In exploring the grounds, I found a working sawmill, a large two story carriage house that could accommodate six horses or mules and several carriages, a sugarcane grinding mill and syrup boiling cooker, corn crib, as well as assorted chicken houses, grape arbors stock enclosures and farm

implement sheds. On the bluff, there were two small houses built over the river and on one was a sign that read "Ben's Fish House".

Bluff Drive extended East from LaRoche along the river to the North Eastern end of the island to the McIntosh's house (which has now been torn down). That segment of the road was closed in the 1960's. Bluff Drive ended on the South end at what was known as Tiedeman's Cottage. There was no Noble Glenn Drive going down into Wymberely, because there was no Wymberely!

The number of homes on IOH was very small. There were no subdivisions at all. Parkersburg, Paxton Heights, Wymberely on the Marsh, Raliegh Drive, and Jacqueline Drive did not exist. The island was covered mostly with woods and open fields. Basically all of the homes were located along the bluff and along the streetcar track, which ran down Central Avenue and Rosenbrook.

Kinsey's Store was located where Janie Coslick's shop is now located at the intersection of Rose Avenue and Parkersburg Road. Mrs. Kinsey had a self-service pump gas pump in front of the store. This was a real u-pump-em because it was not electric powered. You actually pumped a long handle to get the gas out of the underground tank. Gas was about 20 cents per gallon, and it was not uncommon to buy 50 cents worth of gas. The store also contained a post office.

Barbee's Pavilion was located on the Bluff at the end of the streetcar line. It contained a nice restaurant, soda fountain, large dance floor over the water, terrapin farm and shrimp factory. During the early 1900's it was the place to take a date to dine and dance! The Barbees operated a small zoo across the road from the pavilion that contained mostly monkeys and a few native animals. This was an attraction that drew a crowd out from Savannah on the streetcar on the weekends.

South of Barbee's on Bluff Drive was the marina then known as Brady's Boat Works. It was a place where a lot of the men and boys on the island hung out and talked about boating and fishing.

Across Bluff Drive from Brady's I understand that through the 1930's there was a barbershop and a large store, Mueller's Grocery that was owned Herman Coolidge's father in law. Many of the black fisherman from

Skidaway Island, who's families had lived as slaves on the island before the War Between the States, would row to Mueller's Store to buy groceries and ride the streetcar to Savannah to sell their catch of shrimp, crabs, and fish.

The property that later became known as Wymberely S/D, was originally part of 500 acres granted by King George III to John Fallowfield in the 1750's. Noble Jones received a grant of 500 acres on the southern end of IOH, and this property became known as Wormsloe. (Noble Wymberely Jones was Noble Jones son.) Another grant was made to Henry Parker for 500 acres on the North Eastern end of IOH. Most of the Bluff lots and all of Parkersburg were part of the Parker grant.

Fallowfield opposed Oglethorpe in many of his endeavors and was eventually banished from Georgia and moved to SC. His land was then regranted to Noble Jones. The land was later sold in smaller parcels to a number of owners, including the Bullocks, Claghorns and Noble Glenn.

In 1888 Col. John Estill, owner and publisher of the Savannah newspaper, purchased all of the parcels that now comprise Wymberely. He constructed a grand mansion on the river, which was a real showcase.

Judge George Tiedeman, who was chairman of the Liberty National Bank and Chairman of the County Commission, purchased the estate in 1909. At one time he was mayor of Savannah. He renamed the property Carstin Hall for his son. The main house burned down in 1933 and Judge and Mrs. Tiedeman died soon thereafter.

The property was purchased by William Flynn soon after the Tiedeman's death, and he used the property as the mainland terminus for his timbering operations on Skidaway Island.

As I stated earlier, the Southern end of Bluff Drive terminated at the Tiedeman Gatekeepers cottage. This is the home now owned by Sam McGaughey (1 Noble Glenn Drive). In 1944, the cottage was very small and had a large wrap-around porch. The home was occupied by a boy my age, George VanGiesen, and his family. George and I quickly became good friends.

In front of George's house was an oyster shell paved drive that went in a southerly direction for about 1/3 of a mile and then looped along the river

back to the house. George and I learned to drive his father's 1935 Chrysler car on the road. We were both 12 years old!

Next to the cottage along the drive was the remaining foundation of the Tiedeman house had which had burned in 1933. I remember there being an open basement filled with water with goldfish swimming around in it and tall cattails growing from the middle. Cliff Davenport, who had moved to Savannah to be the Executive VP of the Chamber of Commerce, built another house on the foundations of the original house in the late 1940's. Davenport moved from Savannah five years later, and the home was purchased by Jim and Helen Artley. Helen lives in the home today.

Past the ruins was a long, low, narrow building which was a bowling alley. Of course it was in bad condition, but the alley and duckpins were still in place. They had been waiting since 1933 for someone to bowl! George and I gladly obliged!

At the end of the drive was a sawmill with machinery and a large saw blade still in place. Next to this was a very large sawdust pile that was located approximately where Helen Watson's pink house is located today. My friends and I often played king of the mountain and many times I was pushed off the top of the pile to come tumbling down to the bottom, pockets and ears full of sawdust!

At this point, the drive turned back along the river toward the cottage. Near the front of the cottage on the river was a very large, heavy, commercial dock that Mr. Flynn had used to unload barges full of pine logs cut on Skidaway Island. The logs would have been moved to the sawmill and cut up into lumber. The dock must have been built in the 1920's or earlier because it was in very poor condition and it was dangerous to walk on – which of course all the boys had to do.

The years passed and I went off to boarding school in 1946, graduating in 1951. George left Savannah and moved to Gainesville, GA in 1949. He later became a physician and is now retired and living on Lehigh Avenue. We still keep in touch.

I would return home from school at Christmas and for the summer, and one summer I noticed that a subdivision had been started by Jim Richmond on the old Tiedeman property. This was about 1948. I watched the dirt roads

being built, along with a few houses. The main road was named Richmond Dr. for Jim Richmond, the developer, and many of the other streets were named for his daughters Diana, Nancy, and Wymberley, and for his wife Dorothy.

In 1952 Wymberley residents Mary Alice Tarver, Ethel Tomlinson, and Nora Jiles decided that it was time to start a garden club. After printing and distributing fliers for the neighborhood, 60 members responded and attended the first meeting. What a surprise Ann Tatum must have received when she arrived home that day from teaching at school to find she had been elected president. And what a great job she did!

In 1954 the garden club decided that Richmond Drive should be lined with majestic live oak trees. After all, the live oak tree is the state tree of Georgia! The yellowish-brown live oak wood is hard, heavy, tough, strong, and is used for structural beams, shipbuilding and in places requiring strength and durability. Nearly all of our colonial warships, including the USS Constitution known as Old Ironsides, were built using live oak timber frames. It is said that the British cannonballs literally bounced off her sides during her famous engagement in 1812. Much of the live oak used by colonial shipbuilders came from Georgia and especially Blackbeard Island, which was acquired by the US Government just for the purpose of providing naval timbers.

Catherine Palmer was project manager and was in charge of getting the Wymberley Oaks planted. She asked Judge Arthur Solomon, who was a County Commissioner, to help her pick out the seedlings and over-see the plantings.

Judge Solomon was born in 1872 and was in the first graduating class of Georgia Tech. In 1897 he established the E & W laundry, which became the largest laundry in the city. He was appointed to the County Commission in 1914 and served for 48 years until his death in 1962. He was chairman of the commission in 1935.

Judge Solomon was well known for his beautiful gardens at his home on Grimball Point and people came from far and wide to admire his beautiful azaleas and camellias. He was the force behind planting most of the azaleas and camellias along Bluff Dr. and around the county.

He graciously furnished cuttings and grafting materials that has resulted in a burst of beautiful azalea blooms in the spring, oleanders in the summer and camellias all winter. Many of the men living on Bluff Dr. were members of the Men's Garden Club, thanks to Judge Solomon, as he was a founding director of the American Camellia Society.

My, father as well as Ruthie's Dad, were great friends of Judge Solomon and their gardens were full of camellias given to them by the Judge. In my yard now I have many camellia plants that my father grew from scions from the Judge's garden.

Judge Solomon was a one-man park and tree commission. He alone decided where to plant and what to plant. His nursery was on grounds of the old county prison, The Brown Farm, where Mayfair subdivision is now located, and the convicts did the planting under his supervision. His equipment was one county truck with the usual hand tools. The Live Oak trees were dug from either county land or from land of his friends.

Today, you can see the Judge's oaks arching over the roadways on White Bluff Rd., LaRoche Avenue and Ferguson Avenue by Bethesda, as well as in many other areas. The President of the Savannah Electric Power knew that his workers better not touch one of his oaks in order to put up their power lines. If they did, he would immediately hear from Judge Solomon. WHAT WOULD THE JUDGE THINK TODAY?

One of his last plantings was the median of Richmond Dr. with Live Oaks all the way to the waterfront. He had the foresight to plant small Live Oak trees, which we all know are slow growing, because he knew we could look forward to the day of their maturity and visualize the canopy of shade and beauty they would provide.

I was not around to see the Wymberley Oaks planted in 1954, as that was the year that Ruthie and I were married 51 years ago. We were attending the University of Georgia before we were married that year.

In 1958, after spending two years in windswept, treeless Oklahoma in the US Army Field Artillery, Ruthie and I, along with our three children, were happy to move back to Isle of Hope. We purchased a brand new home at 25 Col. Estill Dr. Once you have lived at Isle of Hope you cannot be happy anywhere else!

In 1964, I remember seeing several of the oaks on the corner of Richmond and Diana Drive being removed and then replanted to allow a complete house that Jim Richmond had bought in Savannah be transported to Romney Place for Coach Holmes to live in. Joanne and John Nelson now live there.

The Wymberley Oaks are only 51 years old. They still have a long way to go! You have only to look at the oaks on Bluff Dr. and in Wormsloe to imagine what they will look like 50 to 100 years from now. Many thanks to the Wymberley garden club for having the foresight to plant such magnificent trees for all of us to enjoy.

I would like to present this wooden bowl that I turned from a Live Oak tree to the garden club's president, Helen Watson. This bowl will give you an idea of what live oak wood looks like. All of the garden club members have worked very hard to make Isle of Hope become known as God's country to all who live here. Keep up the good work!