

REDCLIFFE PLANTATION
181 REDCLIFFE RD
BEECH ISLAND, SC 29842
(803) 827-1473

Redcliffe Southern Times

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Historic

House Tours

Thursdays - Mondays

11am, 1pm, 3pm

\$10- Adults

\$6 - SC Seniors

\$5 - Ages 6-16

For more information on
programs and group rates,
please contact the park.

Park Staff

Park Manager
Michael Scott

Park Interpreter
Chelsea Stutz

Park Technician
Jay Markiewicz

Asst. Park Rangers
Theresa Hippi
Abbey Rice
Jordan Stenger

Interesting Fact

The Camellia bushes beside the mansion were planted before 1940. One of these is pictured below in 1950 as Frederica admires the flowers. Today the camellias reach almost up to the rooftop of the porch and are currently in bloom.



Not Without Frederica's Blessing

"My dear Frederica:

Your dear letter so welcome-nonetheless so for being in type, for it lets me go back to you the same way. You all's visit, in spite of the sad occasion, was one of very great delight to me. When only a kid, you sweetly danced with a stiff old man when the others wouldn't and he has never forgotten it, and you have kept in the same kindly way toward him.

Now about John and Redcliffe: Maybe it's not as bad as you and I think. Come to analyze it, rash sentimentality and cool judgement may not be so far apart after all. Redcliffe originally cost the Hammonds \$50,000. When dollars were four times as valuable as they are now....All the land on Redcliffe is good farming land, much of it the best in this section. It has been estimated that there is over \$7,500 worth of untouched timber and woods on the place. The house furnished as it is throughout—books, pictures, etc. is certainly of some value. During good times, Julia turned down an offer of \$50,000. John's money invested here will probably be safe as in stocks—certainly as safe and profitable as in automobiles, boats, or a Long Island estate.

But with all this, I am looking for your clear steady head to hold John in leash. You must be his anchor and come down on him like a thousand of brick when he goes plum damn fool. He owns one of the best farms—country estates—ancestral castles, if you please in the South on the rim of a great bowl, nosed out of coastal plain by the Savannah River 7,000,000 years ago by a glacier. But make him go slow. Accept the natural beauty and charm of the place just as it is, doing and spending barely enough to preserve it. He won't have to bother about the land for 2 1/2 years to come. You have played a very wonderful part in John's social, sentimental and romantic life, now you must play an important one in his material affairs...

Love,
Uncle Henry"

-Excerpt from a letter to Frederica Wade Billings from Henry C. Hammond, Augusta, March 25, 1935, *The Hammonds of Redcliffe*, by Carol Bleser (1997), 386-87.

Early in the year of 1935, John and Frederica Billings had returned to Beech Island on a sad occasion—for the funeral of Julia Hammond Richards. Julia had been the primary caretaker of Redcliffe since her father, Harry Hammond, had died about 20 years earlier. Julia, however, had no children. So the question amongst the remaining Hammond family was who would take over Redcliffe next. Several family members would have loved the opportunity, but simply didn't have the financial means to do so. After all, it was 1935, at the height of the Great Depression, and Redcliffe required a significant amount of work and attention. Yet, John Shaw Billings, nephew of Julia and great grandson of James Henry Hammond, was a favorable option, as he did have the necessary funds as well as a love for the property. From the start, John Shaw Billings was thrilled at the opportunity to take on Redcliffe. Though it is clear from this letter from John's uncle, Henry, to Frederica, that Frederica's blessing was what was needed to make this transfer certain.

There are several factors at play as to why Frederica was hesitant to take on this new endeavor. She and John had built their entire life in New York, where John was the managing editor at *Time*. The idea of purchasing and managing an almost 400-acre estate that needed lots of care would have been daunting. Redcliffe was also a point of contention and the cause of a great deal of stress, among other things, between John's parents, Katharine Hammond Billings and John Sedgwick Billings. Katharine adored Redcliffe, her childhood home, and spent much time there raising their children, while John Sedgwick Billings, who preferred life in New York, felt that the estate continually got in between their marriage. The animosity that grew between the married pair was no secret. Or, perhaps Frederica was less inclined to return to the South because it brought them closer to the place of their most tragic loss. John and Frederica's daughter, also named Frederica, passed away in 1929 at a hospital in Atlanta after contracting meningitis.

Despite the apprehension, Billings, seemingly with the aid of his Uncle Henry, convinces Frederica to embark on this new adventure. According to Billings' letters and pictures, Frederica takes on a primary role in decorating and restoring Redcliffe to its former glory. Frederica lived at Redcliffe until her death in 1963.



Above: Frederica taking in Redcliffe's grounds from the rooftop, 1935. Bottom left: Frederica beside camellia plant. Images from the John Shaw Billings Online Photograph Album Collection. Courtesy of South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C.

Redcliffe Plantation Welcomes Chef Kevin Mitchell, Author of “From Black Hands to White Mouths”

Thanks to all who came out on the 29th and helped make this program such a success. We packed the main hall of the mansion with more than 50 people! Chef Kevin Mitchell shared a wonderful presentation about his journey to becoming a chef and then a scholar. Some highlights included the stories of successful formerly enslaved cooks of Charleston, like Nat Turner and Sally Seymour, as well as learning about some of his favorite ingredients, such as benne seeds and Carolina Gold Rice. Visitors were lucky enough to leave with a few samples of these provided by Chef Mitchell. Chef Mitchell has also been named one of only four South Carolina Chef Ambassadors for 2020. It was an honor and delight to have him at Redcliffe.



Upcoming Events

It's time for another rooftop tour on Saturday, March 28 at 9:30 am and 5 pm! While enjoying the view, your guide will give a short talk on a topic of interest. The program lasts 40 minutes, including 20-30 minutes spent entirely on the mansion's widow's walk. Also includes a walk -through of the mansion attic. This program does not include a tour of the rest of the mansion. Participants must be able to navigate four staircases and should dress for the weather. (max 15 per group). To register, please email redcliffe@scprt.com or call 803-827-1473 by March 27. \$12 per person.

