



Sketch of Richmond Plantation by Charles Fraser, from *A Charleston Sketchbook*

HISTORY OF CAMP LOW COUNTRY

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with bits, pieces, hearsay, memories, *A Day
on Cooper River* by Dr. John B. Irving, and *A
Charleston Sketchbook* by Charles Fraser.

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GIRL SCOUTS OF EASTERN SOUTH CAROLINA

❧ HISTORY OF CAMP LOW COUNTRY ❧

HARLESTON ERA

The Harlestons were descendents of an old and well-known family from the County of Essex, England. Col. John Harleston, Sr. (1733-1793) was a prominent Lowcountry planter whose childhood home was Bossis Plantation. He was educated at Childsbury Academy in the vicinity of Strawberry Chapel and later was being prepared for mercantile pursuits in the counting house of Henry Laurens. After meeting the charming Elizabeth Faucheraud he decided to become a planter. Upon his marriage Col. Harleston bought a large tract of land comprising both Richmond and Farmfield from Dr. Martine, allowing him to be nearer his sister Affra Coming at Comingtee four miles down river. The price of this land was six pounds sterling for uncleared land and thirty pounds for the land cleared and banked. Although Harleston owned other plantations and residences in Charleston and St. John Berkeley, Richmond became his principal seat. Before the American Revolution he represented the parish of St. John Berkeley in the Twenty-eighth Royal Assembly in 1768 and after the outbreak of the conflict he represented the parish in the Third General Assembly (1779-1780).

Col. Harleston and his wife Elizabeth Faucheraud Harleston planted rice known as Carolina Gold, grew other staple crops, raised horses, experimented with marl (a type of clay), and cultivated many varieties of trees. They also made Carolina Grey brick and attempted to make brick more durable.

Richmond Plantation was described as a majestic double-story white house placed on the brow of a hill about two hundred yards from the east branch of the Cooper River. Sketches #32 and #33 by Charles Fraser in *A Charleston Sketchbook* depict Richmond. A typical rice plantation for its day, the surrounding properties which included both sides of the Cooper River were owned by extended family members, forming a social neighborhood. Members of the society were more or less connected by ties of blood or marriage.

Col. Harleston and his wife Elizabeth had three daughters: Sarah Hassell, Jane, and Elizabeth. Elizabeth married Thomas Corbett, Jr. who was a well-established merchant. Col. Harleston died in 1793 and upon the death of his wife in 1805, Jane inherited Richmond. Jane married Edward Rutledge who was the son of Gov. John Rutledge, Chief Justice and signer of the Constitution. They had seven children but Jane survived all of her family. She and her son Nicholas died within a few days of each other. Though he was married he had no children.

Since Sarah outlived Jane, it was she and her husband Dr. Benjamin Huger who next inherited Richmond in 1835. It was still a productive plantation during the Civil War. It was never invaded nor an active participant in the war but did send supplies to the Confederacy. The Hugers had four children, including Dr. William Harleston Huger, who became a renowned Charleston physician and also served as doctor and advocate for the Charleston Orphanage. Being the firstborn he inherited Richmond which he sold in 1875 to W.E. Haskell. Mr. Haskell in turn sold Richmond to J. St. Clair White, a rice planter in 1896. Mr. White at that time also purchased Bossis, Villa, and Farmfield Plantations which had belonged to Harleston descendents, a total of 4,500 acres. Around 1900, during Mr. White's ownership, Richmond Plantation burned.

Today, the only standing representation of these bygone days is the Harleston family cemetery dating from 1793 to 1851. When strolling down the Avenue of Oaks and across the lawn where Richmond House once stood one can imagine the arrival of carriages with Southern belles in hoop skirts anxious for some gala event to begin.

ELLIS ERA

George A. Ellis, a wealthy New York stock broker and co-founder in 1904 of E.F. Hutton and Company, acquired Richmond, Villa, Bossis, and Farmfield Plantations from J. St. Clair White in the 1920's prior to the stock market crash. This purchase comprised 4,500 acres. Mr. Ellis' wife, Florence Adams Ellis, was the heiress of Adams Gum Company, which merged with the Wrigley Company (famous for their chewing gum). The purpose of this purchase was to make Richmond into a hunting lodge and a place for breeding horses and dogs. It was an example of the phenomenon of the purchase and development of nonproductive southern plantations by wealthy northerners between 1890 and 1940. The Ellises saw this as a great investment during a turbulent stock exchange period. The Ellises commissioned the New York architectural firm of Clinton and Russell to build the Manor House and other buildings. The blueprints are the property of the then-named Carolina Low Country Girl Scout Council, now known as Girl Scouts of Eastern South Carolina. In *A Day on Cooper River*, by Dr. John B. Irving, it is stated that the Ellises were completing an extensive residence on Richmond in 1930.

George and Florence Ellis, along with their children Thomas and Jane, spent four to five months at Richmond. Other homes were located at Hot Springs, Virginia and Long Island, New York. Their favorite recreations were motoring, yachting, and hunting. They enjoyed their fifty foot 500 hp yacht complete with a captain. Mrs. Ellis owned eight to ten cars, driving one in the morning and another in the afternoon for a total of 60,000-80,000 miles a year.

Although the plantation was purchased for a hunting lodge, Mrs. Ellis hated to see animals killed so the family hunted mostly ducks. Two deer hunts were held each year but most deer were shot through the lens of a camera and counted on the lawn with their guests at night.

Mrs. Ellis and her daughter Jane loved all kinds of animals but were partial to dogs. At one time over fifty dogs could be found on the plantation. Some of their favorite breeds were Cocker and Springer Spaniels, Chesapeake, Labrador Retrievers, and Setters. In addition to dogs they owned forty to fifty horses. They bred Palominos, training them as show horses, especially for jumping and racing. Among their many horses were numerous prized stallions. Mrs. Ellis so loved her horses that she had a Christmas tradition of putting a Christmas tree in the paddock each year.

The Ellises employed thirty-three men and women to take care of the grounds and buildings while they were there. Some of the employees and animals spent the summer in Hot Springs, Virginia and returned to Richmond in the fall. In addition to domestic staff such as cooks, maids, and butlers there were sixteen employees to maintain the grounds and buildings. To complete the staff was a chauffeur, mechanic, chief engineer, electrician, woods rider, hunter, and a veterinarian. The woods rider patrolled 4,500 acres on horseback and later partly by Jeep to prevent trespassing, poaching, and to oversee the property. The hunter organized and supervised the hunts. Other employees accompanied each guest hunter to retrieve his game, put out duck decoys, and assist in any way. The vet cared for sick dogs and horses. They had a dog hospital and numerous dog houses, one of which could not be replaced today for less than \$6,000 or more.

ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES OF THE ELLIS HUNTING LODGE

MANOR HOUSE

This imposing structure is an interpretation of the Shavian Manorial Style. The thirteen- room Manor House was built with materials from various sources. In one of Mrs. Ellis' many travels she purchased and had shipped a 17th century English castle to be incorporated into the Manor House. The bricks reportedly were salvaged from a Charleston theater and the roof made from English slate. The door facing the Avenue of Oaks is from a Charleston theater and has a Tudor arched top with a metal gargoyle depicting a winged and toothed fish above the arch. On the ends of both chimneys are iron masks of King Charles I with protruding tongue. The unfortunate Charles was beheaded in 1649. To the right of the front door is a hitching post and mounting block. The open ceiling beams in the living room or drawing room were taken from the old rice mill at nearby Rice Hope Plantation. Other living room features include two carved grinning gargoyles, each showing heavyset men sitting on their haunches. Also from the old English castle are paneling, hardware, and French doors which open to a broad terrace facing the Cooper River. On its walls are numerous boar, fox, and deer heads. A mantel over the fireplace dates to 1618. The dining room with 17th century English architectural features is paneled in pecky cypress, has recessed cupboards, and beautifully detailed vine carvings around the doors. The library is paneled in three quarter wainscoting and has an English-designed stone fireplace. The cupboard is a country-type piece with its age indicated by hand wrought iron hooks. In the hallway carved lions guard the bottom and middle of the wooden staircase leading to the upstairs bedrooms. These were for the staff and had little ornamentation. However, the bedroom at the end of the hall has an oversized bathtub which was made to accommodate Mr. Ellis. Over the tub is an entrance to the attic. Jane's bedroom in the west wing downstairs has steps under one window to give her dogs easy access between her room and the outside. Two of the family's favorite dogs are buried beneath her window. The mirrored sconces over Mrs. Ellis' bedroom fireplace, when lit in the evening, reflect off the windows as a skeleton head. The mantel insert in her room is made of Italian pink marble and the bathroom has a corner fireplace. The east wing contains the kitchen, servants' quarters, and a stairway to the basement and wine cellar.

GUEST HOUSE

This structure is a one-story brick building with a slate gable roof and contains two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen, and activity room. There are three fireplaces. Intended as a guest cottage it was eventually used to house their son Thomas and his governess. A brick walkway leads between it and the Manor House but is only partly visible.

CARRIAGE HOUSE

This one-story brick structure with a gabled slate roof is made up of two buildings on either side of a walled courtyard. The front building was divided into two sections: the carriage driver's residence, and the well/generator house. The rear building housed numerous carriages. An iron mask of King Charles I like those on the Manor House is found at the entrance. A fox weathervane adorns the roof.

DOG KENNEL

The dog kennel is a one-story brick building with a slate gabled roof. It housed fifteen dogs in private kennels. The rear side boasts several doggie doors that gave the dogs access to the outside. The south side has a set of linen fold carved shutters.

LOG CABIN

The one-story log cabin has two chimneys, a shed-roofed front porch, and walls with encased windows. The cabin was originally built for George Ellis' mother who wanted a log cabin overlooking the water when she came for a visit. It includes a living room, dining room, kitchen, and a bedroom with bath. A grist millstone serves as the threshold to the back door while a gear from an old mill is inlaid on the front porch.

BOATHOUSE

This was used by the Ellis family for one of their favorite pastimes, boating. It allowed easy access to the Cooper River.

DOCK

Walking down the front lawn towards the river is the dock which leads to swift-flowing water and a beautiful view. The rice fields which once grew Carolina Gold can be seen as well as numerous forms of wildlife.

BUTTERFLY PONDS

Though difficult to recognize, the two ponds once mirrored each other similar to those at Middleton Plantation. The one on the right looks much like a swamp today while the one on the left is being taken over by vegetation and is a haven for many creatures of nature.

GATE HOUSE

The architecture of the Gate House is in keeping with the other Ellis buildings. It is a one-story brick residence with a central brick fireplace. The roof was originally slate. The pierced wall matches that of the walled garden.

DOLL HOUSE

This little two-room house was built as a playhouse for Jane Ellis. It has a door and real windows and is located behind the Carriage House.

WALLED GARDEN

In this formal garden built by the Ellis family, Mrs. Ellis raised camellias. The pierced brick wall and wrought iron gate were constructed at this time. Within the garden is a concrete in-ground fountain that dates to the time of the Harlestons. Originally it was a brick well and brick lined square pit used as an indigo vat.

STABLE

The stable had eleven stalls opening to the outside and a hay loft from which hay was pitched into waiting iron racks in each stable. This handsome building was made of white boards with a slate roof and directly in front was a cistern and two mounting blocks. The surrounding paddock included numerous trees. The stable stood across the road from the present barn built around 1974. The Ellis' stable was struck by lightning either in 1968 or 1972 and burned.

GIRL SCOUT ERA

After Mr. Ellis died, followed by his wife Florence in 1956, their children Thomas Kenneth Ellis and Jane Ellis Summers inherited the plantation. Thomas became a vice president of Wrigley Company. In June 1962 they decided to sell all 4,500 acres to the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company. Thus Richmond Plantation was sold once more. On January 9, 1963 Carolina Low Country Girl Scouts purchased 152.5 acres of Richmond Plantation, including all of the Ellis' buildings, for \$145,000 from West Vaco with hard earned cookie money. The plantation from that day to the present has become a year-round camping site for hundreds of Girl Scouts, introducing them to the beauty and wonders of Carolina Lowcountry outdoor life.

This fairyland of history and wildlife is three miles off State 402 near Cordesville, South Carolina, located between Mt. Pleasant and Moncks Corner. Looking down the Avenue of Oaks transports the viewer to another time as one gazes toward the hill where the 18th century Harleston plantation house of Richmond once stood and on beyond to the Cooper River. Perhaps equally impressive is the stately English Manor House built by the Ellises. In 2006 a conservation easement through Lowcountry Open Land Trust was obtained. Should the property be sold, a highly unlikely scenario, the land cannot be subdivided and developed. Even the Girl Scouts must abide by easement restrictions.

The first year of summer camp was an exciting one. The girls dined in the Manor House while lodging was in tent units and the log cabin. Since revenue was needed, West Vaco bought the timber rights for the plantation around 1965. In the years following, a dining hall, swimming pool, trading post, and campsites were built. Since lightning caused the total destruction of the original stable, a new barn was erected. In October 1970, the Board of Directors remortgaged the plantation for its many additions.

In 1971 the Plantation hosted a National Wider Ops called Jubilee of the Arts. In 1974 the first Girl Scout open horse show was hosted. For safety reasons a fire escape was added in 1975 to the exterior of the Manor House facing the river. Adopt a Room in the Manor House was established in 1976/77 by private or troop funding. In 1977 the camp gave its first Plantation Horse Show for horsemanship to its students. Handicapped campers were mainstreamed into camp life in 1979. Also, the first Girl Scout mounted drill team was organized and camp had its first Spring Fling open house event.

Cookies and a lot of dedicated Girl Scouts paid for the mortgage, which was burnt at the 1980 Spring Fling. That same year the Plantation was added to the National Register of Historic Places. The Plantation Preservation Endowment fund was started in 1981. Also in 1981 a specialized consultant program was initiated called Plantation Pickin's. In the summer of 1984 troop sponsored Do-Dads was created to help keep up the camp maintenance. The year 1986 hosted another National Wider Ops, Carolina Hoofbeat, and the log cabin received a facelift. Troops could be responsible for the restoration/decoration of a Manor House bedroom again in 1987.

A new trading post was erected in the summer of 1989 just prior to the arrival of Hurricane Hugo on September 21 which devastated the Plantation. In March 1990, Friends of the Plantation sponsored a charity Southern Ball at the Oaks Country Club in Goose Creek and timber rights were sold to help pay for the restoration of camp. Because of the Historical Register, all repairs had to be done according to their regulations. That summer camp reopened. Much rebuilding took place in 1991 and the horse program resumed. In 1992 a re-leaf tree planting was held to celebrate the GSUSA 80th birthday. The walled garden was cleaned as was the Harleston family cemetery. On January 6, 1993 the Girl Scout Plantation had its 30th birthday. The Manor House got a new roof in 1994-95. The dining hall

was renovated and the swimming pool was refinished in 1996.

Most of the original buildings have been converted to Girl Scout roles. The Gate House is occupied by the resident camp ranger. In the summer of 1988 an addition was built to the front of the house to be used as the ranger's office. The earlier slate roof was replaced with asbestos shingles. Hurricanes Hugo and Floyd were not kind to the Girl Scout Plantation. There is still evidence of downed trees and damage to the Manor House. This thirteen room magnificent house was once kitchen, dining hall, housing for a few of the staff, library, and relaxation area for girls. Presently it is awaiting renovation. The Guest House is today called the Brownie Bungalow and can sleep twenty-two people in three bedrooms. It also has two bathrooms, three fireplaces, and a refrigerator. Outside is the necessary fire circle for various activities. The front rooms of the Carriage House provide storage on the left, and a camp office on the right. The large room in the rear sleeps twenty. The nearby bathhouse has handicap- accessible toilets and showers. The Carriage House is equipped with a refrigerator and a fire circle completes this unit. The Log Cabin was enjoyed as a craft house. At one time it underwent repairs but has been closed again due to structural problems. Uses of buildings are determined by changing needs and conditions of facilities. The Dog Kennel today serves as the year-round residence for the Outdoor Program Specialist/Resident Camp Director. In earlier times it was the health unit which housed a nurse and sick campers during resident camp. The Doll House, thanks to several area troops, contains dolls, china, and doll furniture which can be viewed through its windows as girls tour the camp.

Though restored in 2000 the area approaching the Boathouse is overgrown and much silt has accumulated as nature takes its toll. To replace the original Stable which burned, a 120 foot long and 60 foot wide barn was built around 1974 by volunteers and Navy Seabees. It includes twenty stalls, a tack room, feed room, restroom, and a hay loft. It is surrounded by several paddocks, a riding ring, and a large pasture.

Other areas of interest include the sites of old Hilltop House, Riverview, and Stono House. These wooden houses predated the Ellis family. Hilltop, for a time, housed property caretakers but fell into disrepair and was torn down. In the 1970's, near the Hilltop site, was a platform tent unit used by equestrian campers during summer camp. Riverview was used as an arts and crafts building in the 1970's and early 1980's. It was removed due to termite and weather damage. Stono House or Cottage was rebuilt after suffering damage from Hurricane Floyd in 1999. It sleeps twelve and contains two fireplaces, a refrigerator, and a stove with oven. Nearby Stono Shelter is a pole construction open-air structure built during the mid 1970's by the Navy Seabees and was used as a recreation hall for the Youth Conservation Corps. Camp was shared with them in exchange for badly needed work. The storage area at one end was formerly used to store council tents, jungle hammocks, and other camping gear. It has since been converted to a restroom. This handicap accessible site also has a fireplace, picnic tables, and shares a fire circle with a metal grill with Stono Cottage.

Dogwood is a platform tent unit with five 4-cot tents, two 2-cot tents, and a bathhouse with showers. Its shelter has a fireplace, refrigerator, picnic tables, and there is a fire circle with a metal grill. Maximum capacity is twenty-four people. Live Oak is a handicap-accessible platform tent unit with four 4-cot tents, one 2-cot tent, a bathhouse with showers, a shelter with a charcoal cooker, refrigerator, fire circle with a metal grill, and picnic tables. Its capacity is eighteen people. Lake View is a cabin unit with five 4-cot cabins, two 2-cot cabins, a bathhouse with showers, and a shelter with a fireplace, refrigerator, and picnic tables. The nearby fire circle has a metal grill. This unit sleeps twenty-four campers. Margaret B. Walker Cottage has a living room with a fireplace, a bedroom for leaders with four cots and a bathroom, two troop bedrooms of four sets of bunk beds each with a shared bathroom, and a kitchenette with a stove and refrigerator. Campers frequently eat at tables in the living room or

go to nearby Tall Pines. This facility sleeps twenty people. It too has a fire circle with a metal grill. Tall Pines is a shelter with a fireplace, refrigerator, picnic tables, and a fire circle with a metal grill. The bathroom facilities are a close walk. Tents may be pitched if needed. Each unit is provided with two brooms, two buckets, a shovel, and a rake. No campsites are winterized or have air conditioning. Troops must provide their own firewood and kitchen equipment.

Camp Low Country provides an archery range used for summer camp and special functions. It is available for troops with a qualified instructor. A Junior Olympic-size swimming pool was built to further add to the list of activities for the girls. Certified lifeguards and instructors are required for its use. The Trim Trail was rebuilt by Troop 289 with the assistance of Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse of Summerville and Santee Cooper for use by Girl Scouts to promote health and fitness. Each station is marked on a tree with a single green ring. A double green ring notes a change of direction for the trail. Upon completion, girls are eligible to wear the Trim Trail patch.

The camp fire circle known as Scotty's Halo is located near the pool. It is the site of large group campfires. It was nicknamed after a camp counselor known as Scotty who was killed in an auto accident on her way home from the last day of summer camp. The fire circle was her favorite spot of all at Camp Low Country.

The trading post was built in 1977 by Girl Scout dad Jim Bateman and son-in-law Ken Watkins. It consists of one room with a covered porch. Located near the dining hall it is used during summer camp for the purchase of various items by campers.

The dining hall was built in the early 1970's as the increasing number of campers outgrew the dining facilities in the Manor House. The original walls of the dining area had screens and drop-down shutters which were later replaced with windows. Air conditioning was added in 2004 as was the walk-in freezer and cooler. The building includes a large kitchen with walk-in pantry, small bathroom, a storage room which has seen many uses, another room with full bath and cot, a fireplace, and a small multi-use room also used as a library. A latrine to the side of the dining hall was later added.

Approaching the parking area and to the right is a small barn used to quarantine new horses prior to releasing them with the others. Further down the road is an equipment shelter for tractors, tools, implements, and general storage.

Also across from the parking area is the Hi-Lo Adventure course. It was built in 1995 by a Charlotte-based company. A small group of facilitators was trained by the course specialist. Its many challenges are designed to build teamwork, trust, and strategy. The course contains the low ropes portion which is intended to be mastered first and then the high ropes for the truly brave and adventurous. The course is off-limits to anyone unless accompanied by a trained facilitator.

The Girl Scout Plantation, renamed Camp Low Country in 2004, has provided girls from far and wide adventures and learning experiences. The program is ever changing and expanding to meet the needs of today's girls.

Tidewater Trunk Gates

On March 15, 1989 the Charleston Museum and the South Carolina State Museum removed two tidewater trunk gates dating back 130 years according to a Richmond Plantation overseer's daily log book. One gate was to be displayed by the Charleston Museum in its South Carolina Low Country Exhibit and the other gate was retained by the State Museum. The tidewater trunk system consisted of a trunk, buried in the bank between the river and rice field, and two gates, one at either end, to control the flow of water to and from the rice field. This simple system allowed the planters to control the

flooding of the rice fields needed to grow the rice. Richmond Plantation was once a prominent rice plantation. One of only a few surviving tidewater trunk systems in the Lowcountry, its preservation was probably due to its construction of native cypress and placement in an embankment near a dock. The dock was used to load barges with rice to take to Charleston but it also cut down the destructive flow of river currents. It is significant that Camp Low Country has been able to share some of its history with thousands of visitors who pass through the doors of these museums.



Sketch of the Manor House at Camp Low Country