

## History of Red Top Estate

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Aiken, South Carolina gained fame as a wintering spot for wealthy and notable people from the Northeast. The roots of the Winter Colony reach back to Celestine E Eustis. Celestine was the guardian of her niece Louise and brought her to Aiken for visits. Louise, was married to New York financier Thomas Hitchcock, Sr. and joined with him to establish the roots of the Winter Colony. Hitchcock brought his wealthy friend William C Whitney of the prominent Whitney family to Aiken to enjoy the climate and the soil perfect for their stables of horses. As a result, the foundations of the Winter Colony were established.

Over the years Aiken became a winter home for many famous and notable people including Albert Carleton Bostwick, James B Eustis, Madeleine Astor, William Kissam Vanderbilt, Eugene Grace, president of Bethlehem Steel, Allan Pinkerton, W. Averell Harriman, Seymour H. Knox II and his sister Knox Goodyear Rogers heir to the Woolworth fortune, Devereaux Milburn, C. Oliver and Hope Goddard Iselin and many others.

Of those most important to the history of RED TOP is Albert Carleton Bostwick who married Marie Lillian Stokes in New York in June 1898. The *New York Times* reported: 'The marriage, at St. Bartholomews Church, was an extremely pretty wedding and one of wide social interest, in the Protestant Episcopalian Church, officiated by Rev. Dr. Greer. The floral decorations were very beautiful. The groom was the son of Jabez Abel Bostwick. The groom is a polo player. He had inherited considerable money from his father, one of the founding partners of Standard Oil.'

RED TOP was built around the turn of the century at a time when the population was c.3600. The Bostwicks moved in later with their two children, but three more were to follow. Sadly Albert Bostwick died at the age of 33. His widow continued to use RED TOP as her winter home even after remarrying to Mr Fitch Gilbert in 1914. Fitch Gilbert was a direct descendant of Abijah Gilbert, founder of the village of Gilbertsville, NY and it was there that the couple spent their summers, before heading south to Aiken for the winter.

At RED TOP Mrs Fitch Gilbert had a 30-stall barn where she trained steeplechase horses and doubtless where the legendary horseman 'Pete' Bostwick developed his love of racing and polo. George H (Pete) Bostwick – a member for the Jockey Club and horse racing's Hall of Fame in 1962 became the first steeplechase trainer whose horses earned more than \$1 million in a year. His horses were voted champion jumper six times – Oedipus in 1950 and 1951; Neji in 1955, 1957 and 1958, and Ancestor in 1959.

In 1930 at Belmont Park 'Pete' Bostwick became the only jockey to ride flat and steeplechase winners on the same day. Ha Ha over six furlongs and Silver Skin to a two-mile steeplechase victory. A student at Aiken Preparatory School founded by Mrs Hitchcock for winter colony children to continue their education in their home from home, 'Pete' Bostwick began playing polo at the age of 10 and went on to become one of the sport's greats winning the US Open six times. He has also been inducted into the Polo Hall of Fame and his son Charlie still resides in Aiken and is involved with the Aiken Polo Club, whose Sunday games are still played at the

Whitney Field – the oldest polo field in continual use in the USA, and a less than half a mile from the RED TOP Estate. Across the street from RED TOP in Hopelands Gardens is the Aiken Thoroughbred Museum and Hall of Fame, housing a dedicated 'Pete' Bostwick exhibit.

The Carriage House on the RED TOP estate is thought to have been built prior to the main house and had fallen into a state of dilapidation in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, until given a new lease of life in a restoration project conducted by the present owners of RED TOP Mr and Mrs Bernard Dukes, from a polo and horse racing family from England, who were inspired to rescue the building and were presented with a Restoration Award from the Aiken Historical Society in gratitude for preserving a part of Aiken's winter colony legacy.

The site of the main house on the RED TOP estate was first built upon by Hope Goddard Iselin, who constructed a small house there prior to building - with her husband Oliver - Hopelands around the turn of the century. Hopelands gardens – now open to the public year-round and bequeathed to the city of Aiken – is located directly opposite RED TOP and also features the Rye Patch estate, also owned by the City and built in a similar architectural style to that of RED TOP. Hope Iselin developed the beautiful Hopelands gardens shortly after she and her husband built the main house, which was taken by fire some years ago. It is believed that Mrs Iselin planted the deodar cedars and live oaks that still grace Hopelands today. Mrs Hope Iselin shared her neighbor Mrs Fitch Gilbert's – formerly Mrs Bostwick's – passion for racing and was known in the United States and England as "the great lady of racing". She was also the first woman to compete as a crew member in the America's Cup yacht race. Her father was Colonel William Goddard of Providence, Rhode Island, a chancellor of Brown University and a scion of a family that had accumulated great wealth from mercantile and manufacturing activities. Hope's husband, Charles Oliver Iselin, a banker and sportsman was called 'probably the most famed yachtsman in the US' during the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by *Time Magazine*.

RED TOP sits at the heart of the Aiken Historic District and its location reflects so many of the featured activities of the day and no doubt the ballroom was host to many of the parties attended by the notable winter residents after a game of golf at the oldest golf course in South Carolina, Palmetto Golf Club – less than a mile away – a game of polo at the historic Whitney Field - a half mile walk – or a hunt in the Hitchcock Woods, a short ride out from the RED TOP Stables. Not to mention that RED TOP is but a mile or so from the hospitality of The Willcox itself.