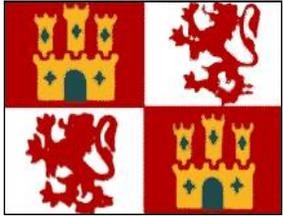
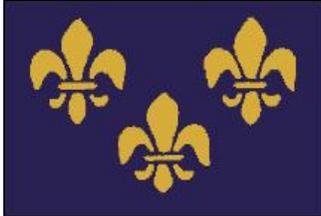


A Brief History of The Rhett House Inn The Town of Beaufort and The South Carolina Lowcountry



Spain (1521-1587)



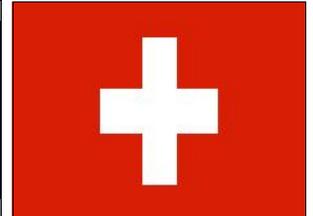
France (1562)



England (1670-1776)



Scotland (1684)



Switzerland (1733)



Betsy Ross Colonial
(1777)



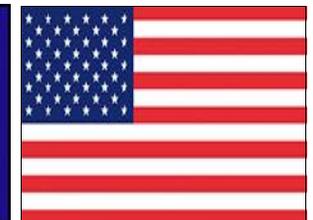
Confederate States of
America (1861-1865)



Union Colonial (1863,
after W. Va.
statehood)



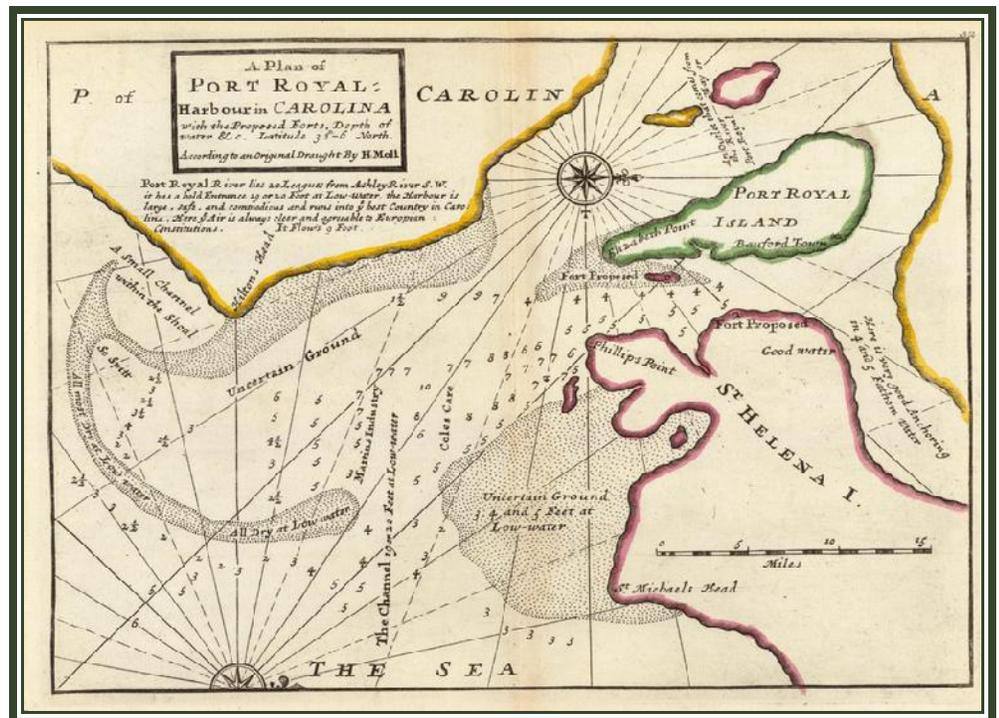
South Carolina
(since 1861)



United States of
America (since 1777)

The Beaufort, South Carolina area is one of the most beautiful and historic spots in America, with a 500-year history stretching back to a mere 22 years after Christopher Columbus (an Italian explorer in the service of Queen Isabella of Spain) discovered America in 1492. Since then,

10 flags have flown over this area, including those of Spain, France, England, Scotland, Switzerland, and Confederate and Union forces; not to mention the many Native Americans that have lived here for at least 5,000 years. There is a 3,500 year-old Indian Mound on Hilton Head Island, and many local tribes gave their names to places in the S. C. Lowcountry: Dataw, Yemassee, Coosaw, Coosawhatchie, Edisto, Asheepoo, Kiawah, and Combahee. In 1514, Spanish Captain Pedro de Salaza landed on what is now Parris Island, becoming only the second European explorer to set foot on North American soil (arriving one year after Ponce de Leon landed at St. Augustine). France followed some years later, when Giovanni da Verrazzano (an Italian explorer in the service of the French crown, and namesake of the famous bridge across New York Harbor),



Herbert Moll, "A Plan of Port Royal Harbour in Carolina", ca. 1736. The fine print says that "The Harbour is large, safe . . . and runs into the finest Country in Carolina." Note "Port Royal Island" (in green) - now Parris Island.

during his explorations of America's east coast, sent word that the area around Port Royal Sound was a very favorable settlement site. The climatic conditions here favored the growth of several profitable crops, and the abundance of natural resources and navigable waterways made the area highly desirable to early settlers. Beginning in the late 1600's - early 1700's, with the importation of slave labor, the South Carolina Lowcountry became known worldwide and among the crowned heads of Europe for its production of the coveted rich, deep-blue dye (the "blue" in modern "blue jeans") extracted from the Indigo (*Indigofera suffruticosa*) plant, which was brought to S. C. from Antigua, British West Indies by botanist Eliza Lucas Pinckney. She experimented with the plant in many different areas until she succeeded in turning it into a major cash crop here in the 1740's. Today, almost all blue dyes are synthetic.

Most people are not aware of the immensity of the wealth which was concentrated in this area of the country before the Civil War. For about 100 years, from the mid-1700's to the mid-1800's, Beaufort enjoyed a prosperity and way of life comparable to that of wealthy elites in Charleston, Savannah, and many northern coastal spots of wealth; in fact, Beaufort was known as "The Newport of the South" at the time. The agrarian success in this area made many of the planters extremely wealthy, allowing for the accumulation of thousands of acres of land for crop planting and for leisure activities. Thus the southern plantation was born - usually with an impressive southern mansion as the centerpiece.

Unfortunately, the vast fortunes that financed this lifestyle had been accumulated by the growing of crops that required enormous amounts of human labor, accomplished by the exploitation of enslaved West Africans imported to America by the thousands from the late 1600's to the early 1800's. With the American colonies' fight for independence from Great Britain in the late 1700's, American-made products fell out of favor with European gentry, and commercial planting and production of indigo disappeared. Turning again to the skills and labor of African slaves, southern plantation owners learned to harness the



Indigo (Indigofera suffruticosa) - one of the only natural sources of blue dye.

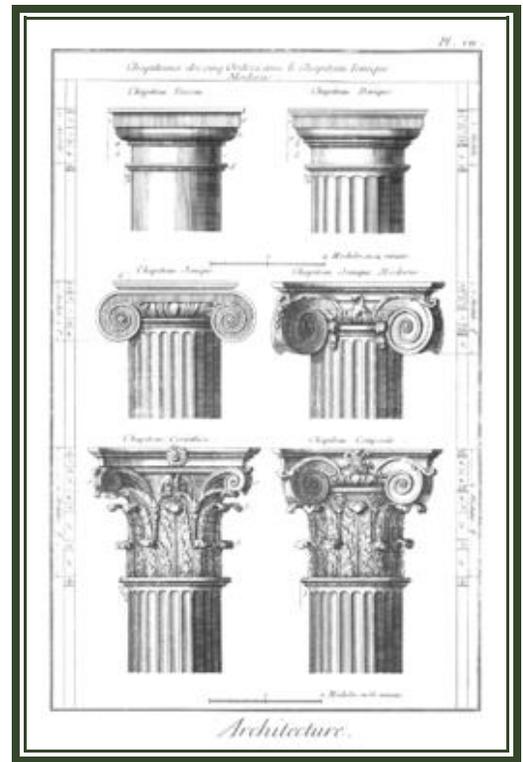
mighty tidal power of the rivers flowing through this region to plant and cultivate one of the human race's staple foods: rice. Although native to southern Asia and Africa, and belonging to a complex plant family called "monocots" (making rice related to orchids, grasses, sugar cane, bamboo, onions, etc.), recent DNA studies have traced most modern strains of rice back to a single variety (*Oryza borthii*) brought to America by slaves from western Africa. Dependent on weather, tides, and many strong backs, the plantation owners carved out vast rice fields from swamps and marshes in the coastal South, developing complex systems of "dykes and locks" to control the flow of water to fields to irrigate the rice. The remains of some of these amazing early American engineering feats can still be seen along Highway 17 in Beaufort, Jasper, and Colleton Counties. Rice became a major driving force of the American economy, and made South Carolina the wealthiest colony/state in the nation - even wealthier than New York - and made many southern plantation owners among the wealthiest people in the world. Also contributing to the wealth of the S. C. Lowcountry at that time were two other crops: tobacco (*Nicotiana x tabacum*), which had already been cultivated by humans for eons by the time of its importation to America; and most importantly, cotton. Also a labor-intensive crop in those days, "King Cotton" was long the pride of coastal South Carolina, and the long-fibered cotton (*Gossypium barbadense*) produced on lowcountry sea islands was prized for its long strands, which made thread production easier and stronger. Millions of pounds per year of cotton were grown, baled, and exported from the South Carolina Lowcountry.



Poster advertising "A Sale of Roman Slaves" in what is now Hungary, ca. 1852; note that they are "in conditie fina" - "in fine shape" - in other words, ready to work.

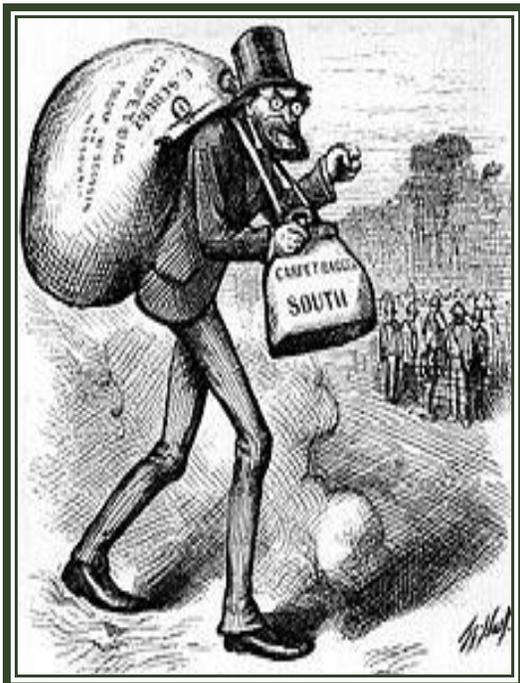
Today, even though the sea island cotton is gone, and coastal land much too valuable for the growing of crops, there is still a considerable cotton crop grown in more inland areas of the Lowcountry. Grand and beautiful southern mansions, many of which still remain, testify to the success of these early planters and crops. Beaufort was the summer destination of many southern gentleman farmers, as the waterfront town was the perfect escape from the heat, insects, and disease often found inland in hot, humid areas of the American Southeast (the exact conditions which allowed the prized crops to thrive here).

One of the architectural styles favored in the South in the early 1800's was "Greek Revival", and the Thomas Rhett House is a fine example of the adaptation of this style to the South Carolina Lowcountry climate, which made wide verandas, large windows, and raised foundations desirable, giving home builders the perfect excuse to built large houses with huge, massive Greek columns as the focus - to show off their wealth and their knowledge of ancient Greek Architectural Orders. The houses here were built to take maximum advantage of the cool ocean breezes ("Form Follows Function" is a famous architectural maxim), with large, wide porches and verandas, and central halls that usually ran the length of the houses. Because these large "town houses" were built as summer homes, they were generally unoccupied for most of the year. Interestingly, the mantel pieces in the parlor and the dining room are of the earlier Adams (or Federal) style, suggesting that they were made for another, older house and installed in the Thomas Rhett House at a later date.



Classical Greek Column Orders: Doric, Ionic, Corinthian. The Thomas Rhett House's columns are of the Doric Order.

The beautiful Greek Revival mansion you are standing in was built ca. 1820 by Thomas Smith Rhett, a prosperous planter, and his wife Caroline Barnwell (one of the Lowcountry's most prominent families) Rhett. They were the first people to live in the house and lived here until the Civil War. Rhett is a familiar name to most Americans, and all of the Rhetts in the South Carolina Lowcountry, from Beaufort to Charleston, were related in some way. Many of them apparently had a keen interest in architecture, having built several important structures - in Beaufort, the Thomas Rhett House (The Rhett House Inn) and the Maxcy-(Jonathan) Rhett House ("The Secession House"); and in Charleston, the Robert Barnwell Rhett House and the Aiken-Rhett House, with its famous "flying staircase", which is one of the most historically and architecturally important houses in Charleston. In fact, legend has it that Margaret Mitchell, author of *"Gone With the Wind"*, named her character Rhett Butler by combining the names of the prominent Rhetts (of Beaufort and Charleston) and Butlers (of Atlanta). Thomas Rhett, along with 18 of his siblings, had changed his name to Rhett from Smith to honor an relative's dying wish that the Rhett name be carried on (thereby benefitting from the relative's will).



"Yankee Carpetbagger" - ca. 1865.

Rice and cotton production continued until several events turned against the rich planters: firstly, a series of devastating hurricanes flooded many of the hard-won rice fields with salt water, rendering them useless for planting crops; secondly, the emancipation of slaves ended the supply of slave labor necessary to maintain fields, operate dyke and lock systems, and plant and pick the crops. These slaves had been captured in their native lands, shipped to America (often through the Caribbean and sometimes Central America - hence the Caribbean influences in African-American culture) by slave merchants, and sold to farmers as workers. The Old Slave Market in Charleston (a National Historic Landmark) is still standing, and on that spot, slave merchants would auction off their bounty of captured African peoples like cattle to the shouting buyers. The slaves were paid very little for their endless toil, and most were kept in bondage against their will in horrid conditions. The idea and practice of slavery was by no means new or original to the 18th Century American colonies; slavery has been around as long as human civilization itself, and most major cultures of the



Rice fields, Combahee River Basin, Beaufort County, ca. 1829. Complex systems of dykes and locks would control the flow of water into canals from the river, and from these central canals to the fields for irrigation.

the river through the stately oaks - totally deserted. As a result, Beaufort was occupied by the Union without a single shot being fired, which thankfully spared the many beautiful houses and buildings from burning. Beaufort then became a hospital/dormitory town for the Union army during their march through the South. The Thomas Rhett House was a hospital for injured soldiers, and St. Helena's Church, just behind the Rhett House, was used as an operating (such as it was in 1861 - antimicrobial sanitation had not yet been invented) room. The Rhett House Inn's collection contains a photograph depicting Union Medical Corps officers and their nurses standing on the veranda of this house during the Civil War. You will notice in that photograph that the house's original veranda did not wrap around the left side of the house, and that the staircase was then located on the left side of the veranda. These changes to the house were made sometime during the late 1800's, possibly after the hurricane of 1896. When the citizens of Beaufort left the town and surrounding area, they not only left their homes, but their slaves as well. As the Union Navy entered Beaufort, all they found was about 5,000 black slaves. Arguably, that was when the southern planter society ended and reconstruction began. Most of the original landowners lost their property here as taxes accumulated and confederate money was no good anymore.

Original owners could not afford to buy back their property from the Union Tax Commission, which allowed people from other areas (derisively nicknamed "carpetbaggers" because of their tendency to bring their money to tax sales in carpet bags) to come into Beaufort and buy the magnificent homes, buildings, and large tracts of land for pennies on the dollar. Some opportunistic white southerners and former slaves colluded with the carpetbaggers to buy property for almost nothing. These "traitors" to the South were called "scalawags". Many former slaves were also able to buy land with the money they earned working for the Union army as domestics (cooks, housekeepers, etc.) The demise of South Carolina's wealthy economy after the Civil War was caused by the loss of the revenue from indigo, rice, and cotton crops. All of these crops depended heavily on human labor, and once that labor had to be

paid wages, it was no longer financially feasible to produce these crops. To this day, no cotton or rice is grown in Beaufort County (although cotton is still grown in inland areas of the state). There is, however, a small amount of indigo still grown on St. Helena Island. For more information on Beaufort's 500-year history, see [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/History of Beaufort, South Carolina](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Beaufort_South_Carolina) or *"Beaufort, South Carolina: A History"*, by Alexia Jones Helsley.

world have practiced slavery - in one form or another - for many thousands of years. In fact, the United Nations estimates that there are still as many as 20 - 30 million humans kept in slavery around the world even today. However, when the Industrial Revolution gained momentum in colonial America, the issue of slavery caused a major schism among the American colonies, and this (among other issues) eventually led to the Civil War, pitting northern states (whose wealthy magnates had also greatly exploited human labor in accumulating their vast fortunes) against the southern planters/slave owners.

In November 1861, a large Union naval armada steamed into Port Royal Sound and laid siege to two Confederate forts, one on Hilton Head Island, and one on St. Helena Island. Hearing the cannon fire in the distance, Beaufort citizens began a hasty evacuation of their idyllic town, which became known as "The Great Skedaddle". The Union navy cruised up Port Royal Sound into the Beaufort River, only to find a breathtakingly elegant waterfront town - complete with magnificent mansions peeking at



Frampton Plantation Gardens, Point South, S. C., ca. 1886.

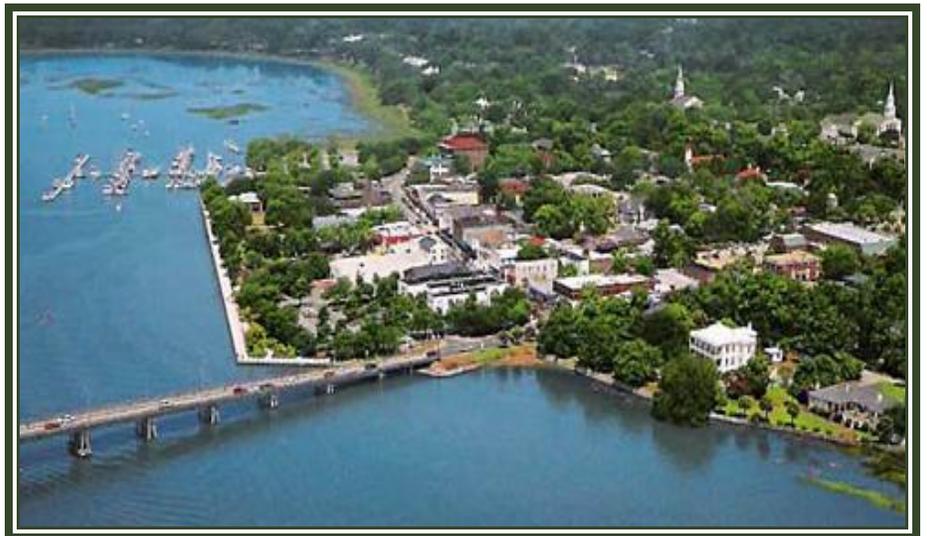


One of our beautiful guest rooms.

From the early 1900's until the mid-1930's, the Thomas Rhett house was a private home. At the end of the 1930's, the Tucker family bought the house, and it was then known as The Tucker Inn. The guests who came from the north to visit during the winter would stay for 3 - 4 months. They were served three meals a day, and the fee was \$8.00 per week - a bargain even at that time. Jane Ridings, the eldest daughter of the Tuckers, bought the home from her elderly parents and, along with her husband, changed the Inn's name to the Cherokee Inn. In the 1950's, the Ridings sold the inn to the Best Western Corporation, which in turn sold it to the ALCOA Corporation to be used as corporate offices during the development of Dataw (note the Native American name) Island Resort, southeast of downtown Beaufort.

In May of 1986, Steve and Marianne Harrison made their first trip south. A friend of theirs, Gene Row, had decided to move from Connecticut to Beaufort and open an inn. The Harrisons were invited to visit the new inn and did so a year after their friend's departure from the north. Both of the Harrisons were born and raised in New York, and neither of them had ever been to the South. It was a beautiful afternoon, and while on a bicycle tour with their friend, he suggested that they buy the Thomas Rhett House. Gene told them that his was the only inn in town, and since his was doing quite well, perhaps they should give it a try. Because he was considering buying the Rhett House himself, he had the keys and gave the Harrisons a tour of the building. The home was decorated in a very heavy Victorian style, with window air-conditioning units and radiator pipes on the floorboards. But much to the surprise of her husband, Marianne thought the house had great possibilities. During their visit, the Harrisons took bicycle rides, swam in the ocean (unheard of in May up north), ate lunch at the Shrimp Shack, and met some locals, many of whom are still good friends of theirs to this day. They became enchanted with Beaufort and decided to embark on a great adventure, with Marianne using her superb taste in decorating (which has been praised in major publications and travel guides as a wonderful combination of southern charm and New York style) to develop all of the Inn's guest rooms and common areas into the beautiful and welcoming spaces you see today, and Steve using his business savvy to run the behind-the-scenes financial and marketing end of the endeavor. He also enjoys officiating at many of the weddings held at the Inn, and is proud to have married over 700 couples (including his own daughter and her husband, and his son and his wife) in 25 years.

And so, leaving their college-age children in their apartment in Manhattan, and their careers in the fashion industry, the Harrisons made the move to become Southerners and Innkeepers. Their only experience was their stay with Gene; they had never been to Charleston or Savannah (the other two of the three beautiful "Colonial Sisters"), or even researched the area. They made the decision to give this new lifestyle a try, and agreed that on the five-year anniversary, they would make the decision whether to stay or go. The Harrisons moved into the Inn and opened it for business. At the end of their first year, they were doing so well they decided to add three more guest rooms, giving the Inn a total of eight rooms. Over the first five years, they added bathrooms to the upstairs rooms, and telephones and televisions to all of the Inn's rooms. On their five-year anniversary, they decided to move from their two personal rooms in the house to allow for more guest rooms. This brought them up to an impressive ten rooms in just five years. They spent the next six years improving all of the



Downtown Beaufort, South Carolina and the Beaufort River.

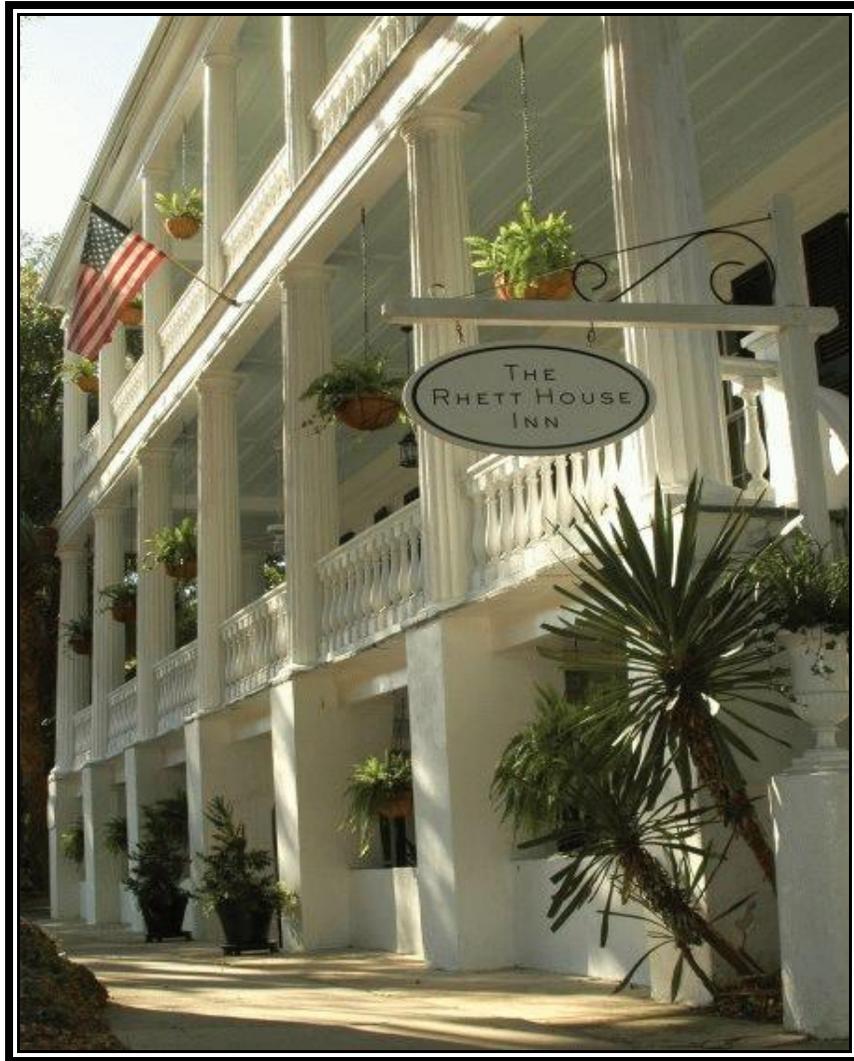
guest rooms and common areas. As the business continued to grow, so did the need for more room. Across Newcastle Street, the former Freedmen's Store, which was built in the 1860's as a combination store/school for freed slaves and their children during and after the Civil War, seemed like the perfect solution. You can view a photograph of the building in its original condition in The Rhett House Inn's collection. The Freedmen's Store was one of only two "Carpenter Gothic" style buildings in Beaufort, but the hurricane of 1896 blew the distinctive gabled roof off of the building. The building was redesigned with a flat roof into a two-family home, and so it remained until the 1980's, when it was bought by the First Baptist Church of Beaufort to house lay preachers visiting the Church. The Harrisons bought the house in 1996 and spent the next year refurbishing it as guest rooms. The Inn continued to grow to the 17-room, AAA Four Diamond Inn you see today.

The Rhett House Inn is listed in *The National Register of Historic Places*, and has been featured in many distinguished publications, including *Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report*, *Travel and Leisure Magazine*, *Martha Stewart's Living - Bridal Edition*, *Zagats*, *Johansens*, and *Southern Living*. The Inn has also been awarded the prestigious AAA Four Diamond (since 1995) and Mobil's Four Star Awards. It has been a sanctuary for many of Hollywood's biggest stars, including Barbra Streisand, Nick Nolte, Dennis and Randy Quaid, Demi Moore, Kevin Bacon, Sharon Stone, Blythe Danner, Gwyneth Paltrow, Ben Affleck, and Sandra Bullock, to name just a few. Welcoming nearly 2 million visitors (and growing) every year, the town of Beaufort has been called "Best Small Southern Town" by *Southern Living*; one of the "Top 25 Small City Arts Destinations" by *American Style*; "One of America's 'Coolest' Towns" by *CBS News*; and a "Top 50 Outdoor Adventure Town" by *National Geographic Adventure*; and praised in many publications for its renowned historic preservation efforts.



"Young Bride" (2006), Oil on canvas, by nationally-renowned artist and Beaufort native Jonathan Greene.

It has been many years since that fateful trip south in May 1986, and the Harrisons have adjusted to life in the South with much more ease than initially expected. They have spent many years perfecting the Inn, and will quickly tell you it is an ongoing process. The Harrisons have contributed greatly to the reputation and marketability of Beaufort, and the town and their many guests have benefitted greatly from their presence, hard work, and great style and taste, which set the standard for small, upscale hotels in this area. The Rhett House Inn is proud to be celebrating its 25th Anniversary in 2011, and we hope you enjoy your visit and will return and visit us again.



The Rhett House Inn, 2011.

1986



2011

Celebrating 25 Years as the Standard of Beaufort Hospitality

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