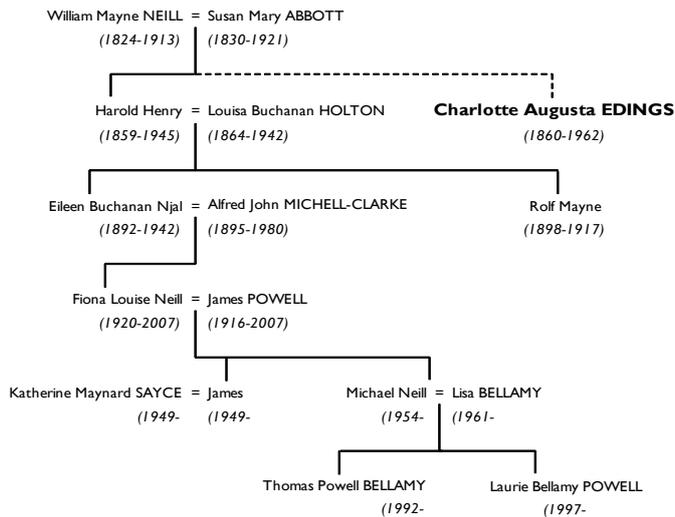


The early life of

# CHARLOTTE AUGUSTA EDINGS

(13 October 1860 – 31 December 1962)



Charlotte Edings was born on the remote sea island of St Helena, off the coast of South Carolina. Both her parents came from established slave-owning planter families. When she was one year old, she would have heard the crashing sounds of gunfire from the Union ships as they fired upon Confederate forts in the Battle of Port Royal, early in the American Civil War. Within a day or two, all the white planters and their families had fled the island.

In 1867, when she was 6 and for no clear reason, Charlotte was sent to England to live with William and Susan Neill, a radical couple with strong anti-slavery sentiments. She studied at the Slade School of Art in London. She married Lewis Beard, scion of a distinguished Lancashire radical family. Lewis became Town Clerk of Blackburn, served on various public bodies and Commissions and was knighted in 1919 "for public and local services."<sup>1</sup> He died in 1933. Charlotte, by then Lady Beard, survived him by 29 years, dying in Grange-over-Sands, Cumbria, in 1962, aged 102.

## The mystery of Charlotte

Charlotte was my great-great aunt. She was alive until I was 13, when she was the only surviving Neill (although perhaps not by birth) apart from my mother. Yet I had never heard of her, let alone met her. The first I knew of her existence was when, in 2010, I was researching the lives of William and Susan Neill and found Charlotte's name, stated to be their daughter, on a census return. A later census return added the vital word "adopted" in front of "daughter", and gave her birthplace as South Carolina.

It did not take a great deal longer to find the records of Charlotte's marriage, and of the births of her three children. There was also an obituary notice in *The Times*. "Lady Beard, who was Charlotte Augusta, daughter of Joseph O Edings, was born in South Carolina, and lost both her parents in the American Civil War. Adopted by an Irish family, she was brought to England in 1866 and lived first in Liverpool and afterwards at Hampstead, where Charles Dickens and Lewis Carroll were friends of the family."<sup>2</sup>

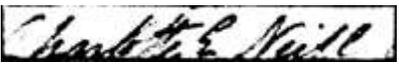
### LADY BEARD

Lady Beard, widow of Sir Lewis Beard, a barrister, who became town clerk of Coventry and later of Blackburn, has died at Cartmel in north Lancashire at the age of 102.

Lady Beard, who was Charlotte Augusta, daughter of Joseph O. Edings, was born in South Carolina, and lost both her parents in the American Civil War. Adopted by an Irish family, she was brought to England in 1866 and lived first in Liverpool and afterwards at Hampstead, where Charles Dickens and Lewis Carroll were friends of the family.

She was married in 1890 and her husband died in 1933. They had two sons and one daughter.

There seems to be some poetic licence here. I do not believe that Dickens or Carroll were close friends of William and Susan Neill. It is most unlikely **that she "lived first in Liverpool"**. The Neills lived in Preston for a while in the early 1860s, but moved to London in around May 1863. A letter from Moncure D Conway, who met them on holiday at Ostend in September 1864, describes **them as "our London friends."**<sup>3</sup> **William's letters home from late 1865 also make it clear that Hampstead was their home.**<sup>4</sup> Charlotte did not come to England in 1866, but in May 1867,<sup>5</sup> and her **father's middle initial was 'D', not 'O'.**

Nevertheless, this represented a start. But, as to **Charlotte's** origins and how she came to be adopted by the Neills, I had no information and almost nowhere to start. One tiny fact opened the door to her incredible early life. The irony is that the fact turned out to be incorrect, yet it was its very incorrectness that made a breakthrough possible. On two census **returns, Charlotte's middle**  initial was given as 'E'.<sup>6</sup> This was wrong: her middle name was Augusta. But when I discovered that the middle name of her second son was Edings, I thought that **perhaps it was also Charlotte's middle name** and might hold a key to her roots. So I typed 'Edings' and 'South Carolina' into a search engine and the floodgates opened.

Most of the research that followed was done, or at least instigated, online. But, on a lengthy visit to the USA in the autumn of 2010, I made a weekend detour to Beaufort, South Carolina, and discovered a large amount of additional information, both on the ground and from local libraries. Putting this information together with what I could glean **from William Neill's surviving letters,** I wrote the first draft of this piece.

But I still could not answer the two crucial questions: how did a 6 year-old girl come to be adopted by a family in another country and – a related question, I felt – was Charlotte really the daughter of Joseph Edings, or was she a Neill?

**In parallel with research into Charlotte's origins,** I tried to find one of her descendants. I made contact with Fenella Begley, her great-grand-daughter, and the descendant to whom such family records as exist have found their way. Amongst those records is a memoir, written to her in March 1957 by her **grandfather Joseph Eccles, Charlotte's son-in-law, compiled partly from Charlotte's oral** memory and partly from original documentary sources. This memoir does not resolve either of the two crucial questions. But it sheds light on both and, I think, shifts the balance of probabilities. This **revised article reflects both Joseph's memoir** and what I had previously discovered.

## **The background to Charlotte's story**

In the late 1700s, the sea islands off the South Carolina coast (principally Edisto Island, St Helena Island and Hilton Head Island) needed a new crop to replace the declining crops of indigo and rice. In the late 1780s, what became known as 'Sea Island cotton' was introduced to the islands: 2 or 3 inches longer in its staple and analogous to Egyptian cotton, it commanded a premium on world markets. A number of families moved to exploit the opportunity. By the early 1800s, those families had acquired most of the suitable land and had established their fortunes.

On those remote islands, almost the only inhabitants were the white planters and their black slaves. There were not many sea island planter families, and they inter-married regularly, sometimes alarmingly. Two such examples were the Edings (alternatively spelt Eddings, or Edding) and the **Fripp families, who supplied Charlotte's parents:** Joseph Edings and Adeline Fripp (known as Addie).

The Edings family was descended from William Edings, who emigrated from Scotland to South Carolina and died on Edisto Island in 1712. Joseph was his great-great-grandson. Although the family were originally resident on Edisto Island, their early cotton estates were on St Helena Island. In the early 1800s they acquired the Seaside Plantation on Edisto Island from the Fripps, and from then on their principal base was Edisto Island. However, they still retained holdings on St Helena Island.

The Fripp family moved in the opposite direction. They were descended from John Fripp (a buccaneer, to use one phrase; a pirate, to use another) who came to South Carolina from Bristol in about 1670. Once the Seaside Plantation on Edisto Island had been sold to the Edings family, the Fripps concentrated their estates on St Helena Island, which they dominated. At the outbreak of the Civil War, it is estimated that the extended Fripp family owned 36% of the cultivated land there.<sup>7</sup>

### Joseph David Edings and Adeline M Fripp

Considering the distance of time, the remoteness of the islands, and the ravages of the Civil War, a reasonable amount of documentary evidence survives about both Joseph and Adeline. But it is not always consistent.

According to one source, Joseph was born in 1804.<sup>7</sup> According to another, he was born in 1807/08.<sup>5</sup> According to a third, he was born in about 1810.<sup>8</sup> The first source is almost certainly wrong. Which of the other two is correct is debatable. Joseph attended the American Literary, Scientific and Military Academy (later Norwich University) in Middletown, Connecticut, where it had recently moved from Vermont. Further details are supplied by the alumnus records of Norwich University (1819-1911):

"Joseph Edings, son of Joseph and Sarah (Scott) Edings and brother of Benjamin and William Edings, class of 1828, was born in St. Helena Island, S. C., and died at Chappells, S. C., in 1867.

In 1819, his parents removed to Edisto Island, where he attended the local schools. He entered the "Academy" in 1825, and graduated in 1828. He engaged extensively in planting, making his home at Aiken and Chappells, S. C.

He was twice married : first, in 1830, to Abigail Seabrook of Edisto Island, who died in 1858. Two children were born to them: Ella, married Col. Thomas G. White, died in 1857; Martha Phoebe, married Col. Thomas G. White, died in Beaufort, S. C., in 1910. He was again married to Adelaide Fripp of St. Helena Island, S. C., who died at Aiken in 1863. One child was born to them: Charlotte Adelaide, born in 1860, married Lewis Beard, Esq., resides at Blackburn, England."<sup>9</sup>

This information must surely have been supplied to Norwich University by a family member. Yet, despite the apparent pedigree of the source, several details are wrong. If Joseph Eccles's memoir (and Charlotte's memory) are correct, Joseph died in July 1864, not in 1867. His second wife, Charlotte's mother, was called Adeline, not Adelaide. Charlotte's middle name was Augusta, not Adelaide. And the phrase "making his home at Aiken and Chappells, S. C." is highly misleading, perhaps extrapolated from Joseph's and Adeline's places of death. There is ample other evidence that, until the Battle of Port Royal, Joseph's working life was spent entirely on St Helena Island.



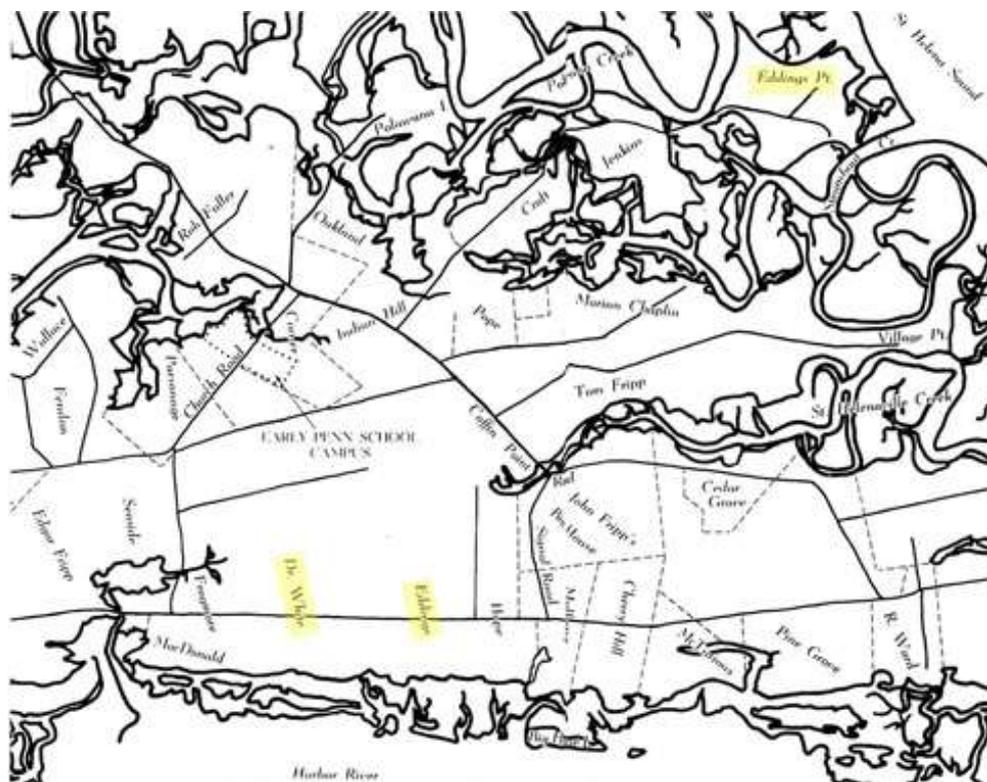
*Fripp house, Seaside Road, St Helena Island*

Charlotte's mother, Adeline Fripp, was born (with equal vagueness) either in 1825<sup>8</sup> or in 1830<sup>10</sup>, depending on which census return you believe. There is no record of her being married, or having any children, prior to her marriage to Joseph in 1859/60, when she was 30-35 and he over 50. Joseph's first wife, and the mother of his two other daughters, had died in 1858.

Adeline was the daughter of Isaac K Fripp (born 1798) and Charlotte Chaplin (born about 1805) – another example of the inter-marriage of the senior planter families on St Helena Island. Isaac owned a small plantation on the Beaufort River, off Lands End Road.<sup>7</sup> Their other children were Augusta (born c.1828), George W, J Edmund (c.1838-1862) and W Evans (born c.1840).<sup>11</sup>

### Joseph Edings's plantations

Two maps survive of St Helena Island in the immediate ante-bellum period, both purporting to show who owned which plantations. One is reproduced in *Tombee*<sup>7</sup>; the other (below) in *The Story of Sea Island Cotton*.<sup>12</sup>



According to the *Tombee* map, the only Edings land on St Helena was the Eddings Point (or Eddings Neck) Plantation at the far east of the island, and the contiguous St Helenaville Pine Land, on which was sited the village of St Helenaville, destroyed by a hurricane in 1893. According to the *Sea Island Cotton* map, there was an additional Edings plantation on Seaside Road, in the middle of

the island, adjoining Thomas Grimké White's plantation (common to both sources), which itself nearly adjoined the main Fripp family plantation.

There is no argument about the Eddings Point Plantation. It was probably the estate the family retained when they moved to Edisto Island. Joseph was not from the senior branch of the family and did not inherit the main Edisto plantations. He may have been entrusted with Eddings Point to establish his own base. But he also purchased another estate on the island. A record exists of a transaction to buy the Woodlands Plantation from a Thomas Cooper Vanderhorst in 1835.<sup>13</sup>

No one on the island now seems to know of the Woodlands Plantation. But, given the appearance of Edings land on the *Sea Island Cotton* map next to Thomas Grimké White's land, and given the fact that there is a road in that vicinity still called Edding White Road, the probability is that there was a second Edings estate on Seaside Road, and that it was the Woodlands Plantation. The website South Carolina Plantations shows Woodlands as having belonged both to Edings and to White. Since only one plantation (referred to graphically as "the took plantation") is mentioned in Joseph's will of 1863,<sup>14</sup> my original guess was that, when either Edings's elder daughter or his younger married White, Woodlands was given to White and rolled up into his neighbouring Woodstock estate. Joseph Eccles's memoir confirms this,<sup>5</sup> and (if the two maps referred to were compiled at different times) it may also explain why only White's estate is shown on the *Tombee* map.



The family did not live on either plantation. Fellow planter Thomas Chaplin (on whose diaries *Tombee* is based, and who was related to Adeline's mother) wrote in 1848: "May 9<sup>th</sup>. Edings now owns my house – I am sorry I ever built it."<sup>7</sup> This house was in the village of St Helenaville, so presumably neither of the plantations that Edings owned had an inhabitable house.

Finally on the vexed subject of plantations, there is this statement: "Augusta Fripp in a letter of 3/9/[18]78 gives the names of the two plantations as 'Home Place', consisting of 393 acres and 'the Grove' of 257 acres, a total of 650 acres, with a value of \$100 per acre. William Edings, on the other hand gives the names as 'The Neck' and 'Woodlands'."<sup>5</sup> William's version conforms with the conclusions reached above. As far as Augusta's version is concerned, the Eddings Point/Neck Plantation is said to have totalled 604 acres,<sup>7</sup> so Home Place and The Grove were probably two different portions of it, the extra acreage perhaps being accounted for by the village of St Helena.

### Charlotte's birth and baptism

Charlotte was "born at 2pm October 13th 1860 at her father's house at the village of St Helena... Joseph Edings's house had 9 rooms and domestic quarters; a double piazza and stoop. He also owned about 90 slaves, mostly grown hands, 100 cows, sheep, hogs, 11 horses, poultry of all kinds, carriages, buggy, sulky, trotting sulky, etc."<sup>5</sup>

No record of Charlotte's baptism has been found, and it is unlikely that one now survives. The Edings family was Presbyterian. The Fripps were split between Episcopalians and Baptists. But: "Both Joseph Edings and his second wife, Adeline belonged to [the] Episcopalian Church and were communicants. [Charlotte] was christened when she was a few months old; her Godparents were her aunt Augusta Fripp, her half-sister Mrs White and her uncle Edmund Fripp. The other branch of the family, whose estates were on Edisto Island, William Edings and his brother Scott Edings, first cousins of [Charlotte] were strong Presbyterians and Will Edings, was an Elder."<sup>5</sup>

Numerous Fripps are listed in the records of the main parish church of St Helena in Beaufort, but neither Charlotte nor Adeline are among them. The parish of St Helena had established a Chapel of Ease on the island, and there was also a chapel in the village of St Helenaville. Charlotte was almost certainly baptised at one or the other. However, both chapels, and their records, were destroyed later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### Life on the sea islands before the Civil War *(if you were a white planter)*

"Lawns with sundials and drives, in the garden were gold and silver fishponds, greenhouses and an aviary. There was also a large fishpond where you could [catch] edible fish at any time of the year and a terrapin pond, a species of tortoise much appreciated by epicures. There was also a rabbit warren and an ornamental house where an eagle was kept and all kinds of fancy poultry.



*Seaside Plantation house, Edisto Island*

I am sitting on the piazza where I can hear the roar of the ocean only half a mile from us. In the distance is a long sandy island covered with wild sea myrtle, a great golden ball and tall edible palms. It has a beautiful beach of white sand and small shells and is as hard as a floor. It was once the village of Edingsville and was the summer resort of the planters of this place before the War of Secession and is connected to the mainland by a causeway. As I write, the mock bird is singing. It is sometimes called the Southern Canary or nightingale and during the moonlight nights one has only to whistle a few notes from the window to have opera on a small scale. The Magnolia Gardens in the vicinity of Charleston, owned by Mrs Theyton, a second cousin of the Edings were known throughout the States, with azaleas, growing in the wildest luxuriance and camellias by the thousand.



*Spanish moss, St Helena Island*

The roads on the islands were mostly sandy and everybody rode or drove through great avenues of trees with the Spanish moss hanging in long festoons from them, alternating with banks of the Carolina jasmine and every now and then distant views of creeks and marshes. On the islands there were only two classes, the Whites the landed proprietors and Negroes, the labourers.

There was no social equality between the races and there never will be. They are a jovial, good natured race, but it takes three of them to do one man's work. I doubt if you could understand them for they speak a patois of English

and African, with peculiar intonation. It is full of vowels and is very liquid. They are very ignorant and superstitious."<sup>15</sup>

"Such was the life into which Charlotte was born in 1860."<sup>15</sup>

## The Battle of Port Royal

The first shots in the American Civil War were fired on 12 April 1861, with Charlotte six months old, when Confederate forces successfully attacked Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbour, about 50 miles from Eddings Point. Seven months later, on Thursday 7 November, a Union fleet attacked Forts Walker and Beauregard, situated on the sea islands and guarding Port Royal Sound and the town of Beaufort, gateway to St Helena Island. The ferocity of that battle was said to have been heard down the Florida coast. Charlotte must have been fifteen miles away from it.

"November 4th [in fact 3 November] was the last Sunday, that the inhabitants of St Helena Island met together at their venerable tabby church [the Chapel of Ease], situated in the middle of the island, and I do not remember revelling more luxuriantly in the delight of the surrounding objects of nature in our drive to church. Was it because it was the last happy day we spent amid the scenes of our prosperity, or was it that a lurking presentiment beset us that all that was to be left of it was to be in reminiscence?



*Ruins of the tabby church, St Helena Island*

The church was filled to repletion. Old grey haired men and elegantly dressed ladies wedded their way thitherwards, in buggies and carriages, not only to listen to the **good man's words, but to hear the latest news. It was during and in the midst of the service** that a horseman, with speed from Beaufort, quickly alighting into the hands of one of the attendant servants outside, walked up the aisle presented a note to Captain Fripp, commander of the St Helena Rifles. This was quickly conned and passed to the pastor who read it to the congregation. It stated in short, that the fleet had passed Charleston Bar and was definitely on its way to Port Royal. It contained other advice to Captain Fripp, relating to our required services. Beyond the curtailment of the rest of the service, the congregation, not unduly excited, was dismissed in order, with a blessing. With the usual delays occasioned by the salutations of each other, by the **ladies and doubtless their accustomed admiration and criticism of each other's new 'full bonnets' and silks, we each retired to our respective homes to await further developments.**

The rest of that Sunday was passed in no unusual mood. A sense of false security possessed us. We can call it by no other name than a fatal infatuation that had overwhelmed us. Surely that insanity, referred to by Bishop Berkley, as sometimes taking

hold of a whole people was upon us. Our confidence in our ability to repel any attack the enemy might bring against us was unabated. Not an earthly preparation had been made by anyone looking towards saving any valuables or provide for the horrible contingent of retirement and the abandonment of the island. In fact, any effort in that direction might have been construed as pusillanimous. Meanwhile Commodore Dupont and General Sherman with what was said to have been the most formidable naval force ever fitted by the US Government, were preparing their plans of their attack on the two earthworks on the morrow. In the meantime, a general order had been sent round to us, the third paragraph reading – Lieutenants White, Fripp and Capers are hereby requested to impress all boats, flats and transportation and assemble them at Station Creek in readiness, in case it may be expedient to conduct a retreat. This paragraph created a slight distrust and some indignation, it was the first intimation we had that there was **danger.**"<sup>16</sup>

The complacency continued. Neither rational appreciation nor foreboding seem to have given the planters any inkling they were about to lose everything they possessed. Instead, the impending battle was to be treated as a sporting event, for which the white planters – as they would have taken for granted – had been given grandstand seats. The official history of Beaufort County records:

**"On St Helena Island, the planters rode carriages and horses across the island to the home of Dr Joseph Jenkins at Land's End. They gathered on the veranda with its broad view of Port Royal Sound to watch the duel of the great guns."**<sup>17</sup>

The anonymous officer of the St Helena Mounted Rifles was amongst this gathered elite of the island. On Monday the writer rejoined his company at Jenkins's House in full view of the entrance to Port Royal. He continues his narrative:



**"Meanwhile, we could witness the progress of the battle as the Yankee battleships in succession, circle around, first with one broadside and then the other to either side of the entrance to Port Royal. The advantage of that day seemed decidedly on the side of the Confederates. All hands on our side of defence were in the best of spirits, and we saw the stupendous fleet with its tenders and convoys, after the first attempt to**

silence our batteries drop lower down the harbour and out of range of our guns. It was considered unnecessary for us to stay in camp. We considered the war as virtually over. Not so much confidence, however, was entertained by those manning the land batteries, especially as Commodore Dupont appeared to be redoubling his preparations for another and more vigorous onslaught. The next day was Tuesday, and the fleet was unable to attack owing to the wild weather. The wind lulled during the night and Dupont renewed the attack which was completely successful and we received information that the Confederate troops would retreat under cover of darkness."<sup>16</sup>

Whatever the optimism of the islanders, and the heroics of the defence, it was not much of a duel. Two poorly-defended forts were no match for 17 warships and 157 big guns – the largest

naval and amphibious expedition mounted by the US Navy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The battle was soon over, and 12,653 soldiers and marines poured unopposed on to Hilton Head Island.

*"On Dr Jenkins's veranda at Land's End, ... the realization of what had occurred began to sink in. By early afternoon, it was clear that the Union fleet commanded Port Royal Sound and that thousands of federal troops would soon overrun their islands. With urgent dismay, they mounted their horses and wagons, rode off down Seaside Road to spread the alarm among the planter households, and gathered their belongings for a hasty evacuation. Some planters tried to take their slaves with them, but most refused to go..."*

Conveniently for the white population of Beaufort, a steamer was moored at the town dock on November 7. Many of the inhabitants who had not evacuated the night before put their belongings aboard the paddle wheeler and were taken directly to Charleston... The army did not actually occupy the village until November 9, and, according to local tradition, they found only one white man left in town and he was stone drunk on Bay Street...

Beaufort was the first southern city to be captured by Union forces, and it was successfully occupied until the end of the war. Few of the planter families ever returned to the sea islands, and not until 1892 were they compensated by the federal government for their lands lost to conquest... It is doubtful if any community in America ever experienced so violent, irrevocable, and immediate a reversal of fortune as the sea islands of the Beaufort district did on the "Day of the Big Gun Shoot."<sup>17</sup>



*Beaufort during the Civil War*

*"The whole of the white population left en masse. No preparations had been made. It was impossible to remove furniture or valuables of any size at such short notice, and time was so short before Sherman and his troops would be on the scene that it was simply a question of the planters saving their families... In the confusion, Joseph Edings left among other things, \$500 in gold, in his writing desk. The house was left in the charge of the house negroes, as they all fully expected to return shortly."<sup>5</sup>*

### The flight of the Edings family

Where did Joseph, Adeline and Charlotte flee on that day?

*"Joseph Edings took his wife and [Charlotte] by boat to Charleston, picking up his daughter Posie (Mrs White) and her children on the way. A few days later the Yankees occupied St Helena and Joseph Edings's house was burnt down in a conflagration which destroyed the whole street. After wandering about they spent the rest of the night on the Post Office steps, [Charlotte] being then thirteen months old. Will Edings, her cousin, then a boy of eleven, remembers seeing them there. They boarded in Charleston for a month and then went to Blackville and finally to Aiken."<sup>5</sup>*

(In another country and another age, Charlotte's house in East Park Road, Blackburn, was called Edisto.<sup>1</sup> There was a steamer on the Beaufort to Charleston run called the *Edisto*: perhaps that was the boat they took.)

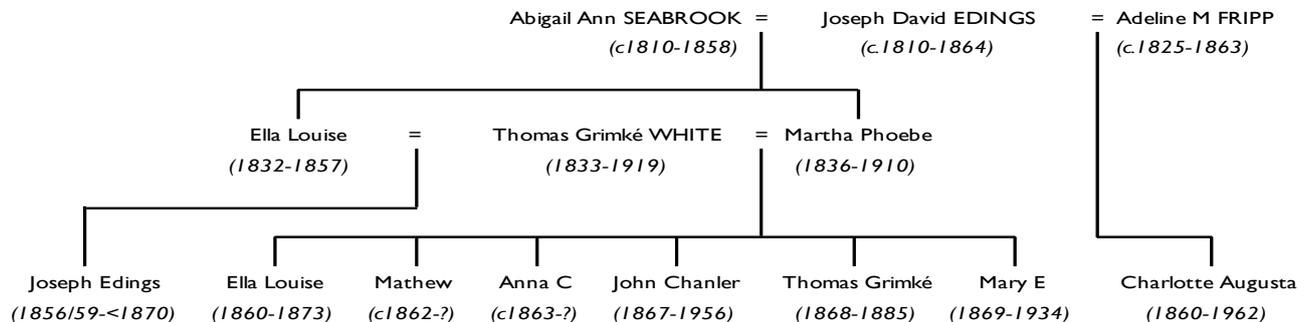
Although the Norwich University archive implies that Joseph owned land in Aiken, there is no evidence that he did; indeed, from his will, no evidence of land anywhere except on St Helena Island. However: "During the Civil War his [William Fripp's] wife, Sarah, and their children fled to Aiken, SC, never to return to Beaufort."<sup>18</sup> So perhaps the Edings flight to Aiken was part of a concerted Fripp flight, or less precisely a general flight of planters from the sea islands.

Nothing is known about the sojourn in Blackville. The next official record of the family, from the Norwich University archive, is that Adeline died in Aiken, SC, in 1863. The same archive states that Joseph's elder brother, Benjamin, also died in Aiken, also in 1863 – on 10 May.<sup>9</sup> There was a Battle of Aiken in the Civil War, but not until 1865, so possibly there was an epidemic in the town. Joseph Eccles's memoir confirms the salient fact: "Here [Aiken] her [Charlotte's] mother died on July 2nd 1863."<sup>5</sup>

What happened next to Charlotte is quite extraordinary. Before considering it, and why it happened, it is necessary to expand on the role of Thomas Grimké White in the Edings family.

### Thomas Grimké White

Alert readers of this piece will already have noticed that White married both of Joseph's daughters from his first marriage. A short section of the family tree will be helpful at this point:



Thomas Grimké White was the son of John Blake White, an attorney, artist and dramatist of Charleston. Apart from being the owner of a plantation on St Helena Island, he was also a qualified physician and later practiced law in Beaufort. He married Ella Louise Edings at St Philip's Church, Charleston, on 11 April 1855. A relative present records: "The Wedding was attended by numerous relatives and friends ... & after the ceremony, the immediate family of the Bride & Groom, repaired to their residence in Limehouse St where all partook of a sumptuous entertainment."<sup>19</sup>

Ella Louise died two years later, shortly after the birth of a son, whereupon White married her sister Martha (Posie) and set about producing a large family. (Their son John Chanler White was a long time Bishop of Springfield, IL.) The tree is set out in this way to emphasise the fact that several of White's children were of a similar age to Charlotte, who was in fact their aunt.

One would expect White to have had a close, possibly almost a father-and-son relationship with Joseph, who had no sons of his own. They were about 25 years apart. White married two of Joseph's daughters. They owned neighbouring plantations on St Helena Island. They shared the

events of November 1861. **The fact that White was the sole executor of Joseph's will** seems to confirm the closeness. Joseph died at Chappells, Newberry County, SC, whether in 1864 or 1867. The 1870 census shows White and his family living at Chappells<sup>20</sup> (in fact at Cross Hill Township, but that is very close to Chappells and must surely refer to the same property). Several letters written by Thomas Grimké White survive from 1871/3, giving his address as 'Chappells Depot'.<sup>19</sup>

The overwhelming probability is surely that, following Adeline's death in July 1863 at Aiken, the 53 year-old widower Joseph and his 2 year-old daughter Charlotte would have moved in with the White family at Chappells, where Joseph subsequently died. **Charlotte's half-sister** Martha (Posie), 24 years her senior, would have taken the place of her mother. And Charlotte would have been living in a family with nieces and nephews of about her own age.

**This did not happen:** "The family then split, Augusta Fripp, [Charlotte's] aunt and old Mrs Fripp, [Charlotte's] grandmother, took [Charlotte] to Greenville while Joseph Edings went with Posie White's family to Chappell's Depot, where he died in July 1864. Here (Greenville) [Charlotte] remained until 1867 when on her adoption by Mr Neill, she sailed for Liverpool."<sup>5</sup> (In all the circumstances, it would seem that 1864, rather than 1867, was the year of Joseph's death.)

## Life in Greenville

Charlotte had some memories of her life in Greenville with her aunt and grandmother, **between her mother's death in 1863 and her journey to a new life in England in 1867:**

"She remembers playing with the children of the negroes at Greenville, walking to get ice from the ice house or pit, where it was stored and fanning her mother(?) when **she was ill, with a fan of eagle's feathers.** There was also the church where the whites sat in the body and the negroes behind a curtain in the gallery.

She remembers visiting a lady, who was ill in bed, with her Aunt Augusta Fripp and seeing there a round bath with four upright posts round it and a cistern on the top with perforated holes. As the occupant sat in the bath the slave poured water into the cistern which acted as a shower bath.

"**Little pitchers have long ears.**" She heard her Aunt, discussing with a visitor, a murder just committed by a negro, who had murdered a white woman, put the body in a barrel and rolled it into the river.

Readers of 'Gone with the Wind' will realise the privations they endured those years. The Confederate notes became of less and less value, and in any case there was little food to buy. The staple food at the end and after the war appeared to be yams and hominy. In a letter at this period, shortly before his death, Joseph Edings writes to his cousin: - "You may not have the act passed by our Congress and crazy President and Government, requiring all holders of Confederate notes or bills to invest them in government bonds between February 1st and April 1st. After that they will have to submit to a loss of thirty three and one third, 40% in May and by January 1st will be worthless. **Better Bonds, I suppose than nothing.**"

The reconstruction period after the war was, in many ways, worse than the war years. They lived rent free at Greenville. Aunt Augusta tried to make ends meet, by needlework and teaching. But nobody had any money either for embroidery or

education, and there must have been many days when they wondered where the next meal was to come from. In spite of all this the southerners did not lose their pride."<sup>5</sup>

### The expatriation of Charlotte

In May 1867, Charlotte was sent to England to live with William and Susan Neill. She was uprooted from her close family in South Carolina and despatched several thousand miles to live with an unknown couple in an unknown country. Even if one makes every allowance for the extreme deprivations of the present, and the uncertainties of the future, this still seems a quite extraordinary occurrence.

Poverty is relative. The Edings, Fripp and White families had been deprived of their lands, deprived of the income they derived from them, and deprived of most of their capital (which was chiefly in the form of slaves). Yet they were not penniless, and family usually comes first. Charlotte's aunt and grandmother may have been on the breadline, but Thomas Grimké White was not. Apart from being a planter, he was a physician and "had a practice at Chappells Station in Newberry County in 1871".<sup>19</sup> The 1870 census<sup>20</sup> shows one servant in the household. White's assets were shown as \$2,000, vastly less than before the Civil War, but not negligible. He and Martha continued to produce children at a rapid rate, so feeding one more young mouth can hardly have been an insurmountable problem.

It was in considering all these circumstances that I started to speculate whether Joseph Edings was really Charlotte's father, or whether her father was a Neill. When I first read in Joseph Eccles's memoir that, after her mother's death, Charlotte was separated from her father too, it strengthened the suspicion. The inference seemed to be that Charlotte was never an Edings, that the widower Joseph had married Adeline to lend respectability to an illegitimate birth and that, after Adeline's death, it was up to the Fripps to raise her.

Possible support for this thesis comes from a US Census return. A census was conducted in 1860<sup>8</sup> and the record for Joseph and Adeline has survived. The census was enumerated on 25/26 September 1860, but required residential lists to be provided as at 1 June. At that date, the Edings household on St Helena Island consisted of Joseph D Edings and A M Edings.

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SCHEDULE 1—Free Inhabitants in St Helena Parish in the County of Beaufort State of South Carolina enumerated by me, on the 25 & 26 day of Sept 1860. Thomas Edings Post Office Beaufort S.C.

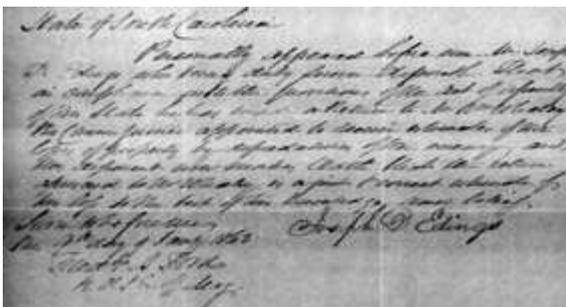
1	2	3	4			7	8		9	10	11	12	13	14
			5	6	6		Value of Real Estate	Value of Personal Estate						
11	11	Male	25	0	0	White	\$50,000	\$0	South Carolina					
		Female	25	0	0	White			South Carolina					

The census also sheds light on the marriage of Joseph and Adeline. There is a column to indicate 'Married within the year', and that is ticked for Joseph and Adeline. It is not clear whether the year in question dates from 1 June (the residency requirement) or 25/26 September (the census date), but either way it raises the possibility that Adeline was already pregnant when she married Joseph. The form gives South Carolina as the birthplace of both of them, and it gives the value of Joseph's estate as \$50,000.

## The will of Joseph Edings

Joseph's will was made at Aiken, SC, on 7 October 1863,<sup>14</sup> three months after Adeline's death. His entire estate (consisting principally of his land on St Helena Island and "the Negroes (Ninety five in all)" that he 'owned' there) is divided in half. One half is left to Thomas Grimké White in trust for Charlotte or, should she "depart this life without lawful issue", for his son, Joseph Edings White. The other half is to be "equally divided among the Son of my lamented daughter Ella Louise White and the Children of my daughter Martha Phoebe White." White is both sole executor of the will and the trustee of Charlotte's legacy.

Nearly a quarter of a century later, in 1887, White is still battling the courts to get any compensation for the expropriation of Joseph's land.<sup>21</sup> He has bowed to circumstance and given up any claim for "the Negroes". His claim for the land amounts to \$365. This compares with Joseph's statement of losses incurred in the Civil War of \$73,634,<sup>22</sup> none of which had been recovered. On the face of it, Charlotte has done well out of this will. In practice no one has done well: there isn't any money.



*Joseph Edings: Civil War claim*

Joseph has surely made the will on the basis that White will support and provide for his own children, while Charlotte has no other means.

On the information available, one cannot conclude that Charlotte has done either better or worse out of this will than one would expect.

## Who was Charlotte's father?

If his will was the only evidence, one would conclude that Joseph was Charlotte's father. If Charlotte's removal from the Edings and White household after her mother's death, and her subsequent 'adoption' in Britain, were the only evidence, one would conclude that he was not. The one piece of evidence that would tip the balance decisively – the date of Joseph and Adeline's

WILL OF  
JOSEPH D. EDINGS

1863  
I, the late of Do<sup>ct</sup> Joseph D. Edings "Town of Aiken" Barnwell District in the name of God Amen I Joseph D. Edings of St. Helena Island St. Helena Parish: Beaufort District State of South Carolina being of sound mind and memory blessed be Almighty God do make this my last will and testament, that is to say I will and bequeath my best plantation situated on St Helena Island Beaufort District, State of So. Car. the pine barren on which is situated the Village of St Helenaville, also the Negroes (Ninety five in all) or whatever money or value which may at any future time be paid by the Confederate or any other Government as indemnification for their loss Also whatever may be found on the plantation undestroyed by the enemy, Also whatever money or value I may not possess or hereafter become entitled to, to my son in law Thomas G. White. In trust however to the following intents and purposes, Viz. One half of the aforesaid plantation, also one half of the pine barren aforesaid on which is situated the village of St Helenaville, also one half of the Ninety five Negroes aforesaid or one half of whatever equivalent may be paid at any future time by the Confederate or any other Government as indemnification for their loss, also one half of whatever may be found on the plantation undestroyed by the enemy, also one half of whatever money or value I may not possess or hereafter become entitled to I leave to my daughter Charlotte Augusta Edings, during her natural life, and should she marry and have issue then to her Child or Children forever at her death, But should my said daughter Charlotte Augusta Edings depart this life without lawful issue then I direct that the half of my property above enumerated shall revert to my Grandson Joseph Edings White his heirs Executors and Administrators forever.

marriage, and whether it was less than nine months before Charlotte's birth – appears to be irretrievably lost. (Although, of course, Joseph could still have been Charlotte's father in that event.)

If Joseph was not Charlotte's father, who was? He could have been some unnamed, unknown southerner, living in Beaufort or on St Helena Island. Given the close relationship between the Edings and Fripp families (there had been other marriages between them), it seems plausible that the widowed Joseph could have married Adeline to provide a cloak of respectability and a home for her child. However, a strong case can be made that it was Henry Neill, William's brother. To repeat the central question: why was the 6 year-old Charlotte removed from her close family and transported several thousand miles to begin a new life with a strange family in a strange country, if not for the fact that she was a Neill?

In theory, William Neill could have been her father. He was in America when Charlotte was conceived, without his wife. However, letters survive from him that cover all the time he was in America in that period,<sup>4</sup> never more than about a week apart. He could not have visited South Carolina, and it seems highly unlikely that Adeline would have been in New York or Boston. His new wife, Susan, had returned to Belfast to give birth to their son. With all this, with the whole tenor of his correspondence, and with what is known about William, it does not seem possible that he could have been Charlotte's father.

Henry Neill was, beyond much doubt, a seasoned philanderer. (See the piece on *The life and families of Henry Montgomery Neill* for chapter and verse.) He was born in 1828, so was about the same age as Adeline. He was in America throughout the relevant period. His first wife had died 18 months before Charlotte would have been conceived in about January 1860. Henry's job was to travel round the cotton fields and inspect the crops. In its obituary notice, the New York Times said he was "reputed to be the greatest cotton crop estimate expert in the world".<sup>23</sup> On 25 October 1859, William wrote to his wife: "... Henry left on Sat for Savannah & Mobile."<sup>4</sup>

Savannah is about 30 miles from St Helena Island. At first sight, Henry would need to have stayed in the Savannah area for more than two months to be in the frame. But William's letter cannot necessarily be taken literally. Maybe Henry went to Mobile first. Maybe he went to other places. He could have been in the area for some time. His job was to inspect cotton crops: there was no shortage of them around Savannah and some of the finest were on St Helena Island.

Another point in favour of Henry's paternity, or at least not against it, is William Neill's will. Made in 1894, by which time Charlotte is married to a successful husband, it leaves nothing directly either to her or to his natural son Harold, but trusts in Susan to "best insure the interests of our beloved children."<sup>24</sup> This is, of course, much less conclusive in its intent than the will of Joseph Edings, but does not suggest a discrimination between Harold and Charlotte. The effect of this point is surely to make it unwise to read too much into Joseph Edings' will. Charlotte cannot have been both an Edings and a Neill. Yet neither Joseph nor William appear to have discriminated against her in their wills.

Finally, it is perhaps telling that no reference to Joseph and Adeline's marriage has been found, other than the occasional mention of it as a fact. Even if the church record does not survive, or is in an inaccessible archive, one would have thought that some greater allusion to it would be found amongst the substantial internet accounts of the Edings and Fripp families, or within newspaper archives. It may have been Joseph's second marriage, but it was Adeline's first, and the Fripes were a noteworthy family. This has all the appearance of a low key wedding that went uncelebrated.

In considering the means and the motives of **Charlotte's 'adoption'**, the means are not hard to discern. William Neill was a cotton merchant, resident in New York until 1859. In a letter to his wife from New York of 25 October 1859, William writes: "in came Mr D. Fripp [possibly either **Charlotte's** uncle or her great-uncle] ... & paid a long visit".<sup>4</sup> No direct link between the Neills and either Joseph Edings or Adeline Fripp or Thomas Grimké White can be substantiated, but it is not hard to see that a link could have existed. In addition, as described later, **William's** sister **Mary Anne** knew two families who were also trying to adopt Charlotte, so she could have provided the link. As, of course, could Henry Neill.

It is the motive that baffles.

Not on the Neill side. William and Susan had one natural child, Harold, and the inference from **William's** correspondence is that they would have liked more. It is perhaps significant that **William** wrote to **Susan**, on 6 February 1860, "I am greatly distressed dear to hear of your sufferings with your hips & your having to give up nursing"<sup>4</sup>. It is probable that Susan was unable to have more children. In which case, an adopted sister for Harold could have been an appealing option.

So the means of **Charlotte's** expatriation are easy to envisage, and the motive on the part of the Neills. It is the motive on **White's** part that seems incomprehensible. Why did he allow the expulsion of his wife's 6 year-old half-sister from the family?

### The probable truth

Times change. Once, any family member would go to the utmost lengths to hide or deny a stigma of illegitimacy within the family. Now, it seems rather exciting to imagine Charlotte as the love child of Henry Neill and Adeline Fripp and to trumpet the fact. I would prefer to believe it is true. When I first wrote this piece, I decided it probably was true. Then I decided it probably wasn't. Now, with yet more information on **Henry's** apparent promiscuity, I am not so sure again. However, on balance, I think the marginal probability is that Joseph Edings was **Charlotte's** father. If that is the case, she is not a blood relative of mine and does not belong on this webpage. But her story is so wonderful, she will remain here anyway.

I have reluctantly reached this conclusion for three reasons. The first is the content and timing of **Joseph Edings's** will.<sup>14</sup> There is nothing unusual (as evidenced by **John Abbott's** will in *The early life of Susan Mary Abbott*) in a 'father' leaving all or most of his estate to a 'daughter' who is not his daughter. However, the fact that **Joseph's** will was made after **Adeline's** death, and at about the time of his separation from Charlotte, seems significant. If Charlotte was not an Edings; if she was to be regarded henceforth as a Fripp – would Joseph have made this particular will? The Fripps were a wealthy family – in as far as any planter family was wealthy at that particular moment – and certainly no less wealthy than the Edings family.

The second reason stems from a now better, although far from perfect, understanding of the practical mechanics of **Charlotte's** adoption. Let me put together two separate extracts from **Joseph Eccles's** memoir. "[Charlotte] must have been an attractive child, as three families wanted to adopt her. They were the de Forests, the Elliotts and the Neills. The Elliotts and de Forests were both Southerners who live in the North."<sup>5</sup> And, quoting a letter from William after bringing Charlotte to England in May 1867: "Now I beg and insist, that you will not tell this, or touch on the matter, except very lightly to Mrs Elliott or Mrs de Forest for I cannot help fearing that if these ladies knew it all, they would never be content to be apart from her, and at all events should they recover their

means and position, I might have much trouble. My chief hope is that both sides will gradually forget each other."<sup>26</sup>

This letter was written to William's sister, Mary Anne, who at that time – and for several months either side – was in Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, caring for the children of her sister Letitia, while Letitia and her husband Charles Loring Brace were in California. William cannot have failed to have known all of this. So, if he writes in this way, it seems certain that where Mrs Elliott and Mrs de Forest had gone to "live in the North" was in or near Hastings, and that they were friends or acquaintances, either of Mary Anne herself, or of the Braces. This in turn gives a plausible reason for William to have become aware of the possibility of adopting Charlotte, and one that had nothing to do with Henry. (Mary Anne Neill died shortly after she would have received William's letter – in July 1867.)

The final reason concerns Thomas Grimké White, who appears regularly in this story and does not emerge with great credit. Given the precise timing and circumstances of events, White must have been the prime mover in separating Charlotte from her father and her half-sister, setting in train the events that led to Charlotte's adoption. Why? Charlotte's cousin, Will Edings, offers this account in a letter to Charlotte:

"I am acquainted with your brother-in-law Colonel White and he is considered a very bright and intelligent man, but he has not made your sister's life a very happy one. It is necessary to explain myself that I should go into sad facts of family history; facts that you should know in justification of your sister's conduct and action towards you, and while it saddens me to write these for two reasons, the first that it will be painful for you personally, and secondly, that it disparages our family.

As you may be aware, Colonel White married your eldest half-sister, Ella Edings, a belle and a beauty. By this marriage there was an only child, Joseph Edings White, who at his mother's death, was given to her sister, Martha Phoebe (Posie) the present Mrs White, with the injunction, never to part with him, and to rear him as her own child. When a decent time had elapsed, Colonel White proposed marriage to his sister-in-law but was refused with scorn. Finding that his suit was unavailing and without success, he informed her that he would take away the child unless she consented to the union. After a long struggle with her feelings, she became his wife, but what happiness could be expected from such a marriage?

Several years after, during a severe illness, opium was prescribed for your sister, by her physicians and administered for some time, and when she recovered, she was a confirmed opium eater. Her husband, wishing to break her of the habit, stopped her too suddenly and she is now almost an imbecile, but very quiet and gentle."<sup>15</sup>

When Will Edings writes of "facts that you should know in justification of your sister's conduct and action towards you", the conduct he is surely referring to is Martha's consent to Charlotte being separated from her father and sent to live with her aunt – something that must still have aggrieved Charlotte, as it would anyone. Will's letter provides an informed explanation for an otherwise inexplicable sequence of events.

This is what probably happened. When Adeline died, Thomas Grimké White agreed that Joseph Edings could come and live with his family in Chappells. Since Edings died the following year, and may already have been ill, this was not much of a commitment on White's part, especially if he was anxious to avoid any substantial rewriting of Joseph's will, from which he and his family

stood to benefit as much as Charlotte. But he refused to take in Charlotte, so Charlotte was sent to live with an aged grandmother and an unmarried, impecunious aunt, in the most uncertain of times. They decided, a few years later, that Charlotte should be given a better chance in life than they could provide. Their preference was probably for the de Forests or the Elliotts, but they seem to have been destitute as well. **And while they might "recover their means and position" in the future,** for the moment the Neills, in a more secure position, in the richest country in the world, and with some connections to vouch for them, seemed the better bet.

Ironically, this child of white supremacy ended up living in a radical, abolitionist family. This would have horrified Thomas Grimké White. He, like Joseph Edings, was an unrepentant supporter of slavery. A contemporary on St Helena Island calibrated his fellow planters for their relative cruelty. *Thomas G White [and] Joseph D Edings were held to be less cruel but still "very tight" – the term used to describe a hard master.*<sup>7</sup> A pamphlet survives in which White fulminates against the moral delinquency of the North in the Civil War, making some of the same accusations **that are made by America's critics today in its reference to the "true and fervent worshippers of the almighty dollar".**<sup>25</sup> Perhaps White never knew the political views of the family to which Charlotte was entrusted, or that William Neill was an admiring acquaintance of the "blind fanatic"<sup>25</sup> Charles Sumner.

This still leaves the puzzle of why I had never heard of Charlotte from my mother. If Henry had been her father, my mother's horror of illegitimacy could explain it. Maybe there was a rift in the family and Charlotte fell out with her adoptive brother Harold. Maybe Charlotte never showed much interest in my mother, so the lack of interest was reciprocated. Or maybe my mother never knew of Charlotte's existence either.

## The start of a new life

Whoever her father, whatever the sequence of events, Charlotte came to England in May 1867 on the steamer *City of Paris*, to begin a new life with William and Susan Neill, who accompanied her on the voyage. William describes the journey:

**"The ship was crowded and 2 breakfasts, 1 lunch, 2 dinners at 2pm and 4pm, 2 teas and 1 supper, were served...** Well, we are charmed with her and delighted with her already. She is such a dear little doll, and so fascinating in her ways, one cannot help fondling and playing and romping with her. And she is really a most remarkable child. She is like quicksilver, full of life and activity all the time, all over the ship, so far as she is allowed to go, hardly ever off her feet except at meals and yet never tired. Playing with the children and amongst them foremost of them or romping with the gentlemen among whom she has quite a number of admirers, who flirt with her. But what is more interesting about her to me, is the depth of her love for her Aunt and her anxious thoughts about her and her Grandmother. Every evening, she refers to them when she is going to bed, and has generally to give vent to her feelings in a good bout of tears before she can be quieted, and it cannot be homesickness, for she is perfectly happy and when she talks of going back to her Aunty, as she sometimes does, she still will not admit she would leave us for a while and then generally, proposes that Aunty should come to her and her anxious thoughtfulness about them is wonderful. She asked Susan

the other night, if Papa would give her money to buy something for aunt, and when told I would, and asked what she would buy, she said a good plain dress and have it made up, for Aunty was kept so busy she could not sew it herself, and also she said a piece of calico.

Last night when she went to bed, she had a little cry and asked for me. She fell on my shoulder and I had to encourage her before she would speak; when she went on 'Grandma's house is very old and bad and every time anything shakes, a brick falls out or plaster falls off. It belongs to Cousin \*\*\*\*\* and she won't do anything'. I encouraged her to go on, and she just repeated sobbing what she had said about the house, leaving me to supply the rest. Isn't it remarkable for such a little mite and one as full of fun as she is all day? There is more in many a child than is dreamt of in my philosophy and I have certainly never met so remarkable a maid. To physical pain she is a little heroine. Not a tear, yesterday, when she fell violently full length on the back of her head on the deck, and only laughed when she got up, but whenever she thinks of poor old Aunty she is off at once. She says her aunt worked hard to give her whatever she wanted and my 'own friends wouldn't give me the length of their finger nails'. I suppose she had heard and taken in more than was supposed – the old lady uttering her sentiments about some of the said friends!<sup>1726</sup>

So Charlotte's new life began, and what a life that was too. And perhaps she died (in 1962, aged 102, in idyllic English surroundings, already 54 when World War I began, the excitements of the 1960s just starting) with the sound of Union cannons still ringing in her ears.

Jim Powell, 11 October 2013

## Acknowledgement

I am hugely grateful to Fenella Begley for sending me her grandfather's memoir and related correspondence.

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