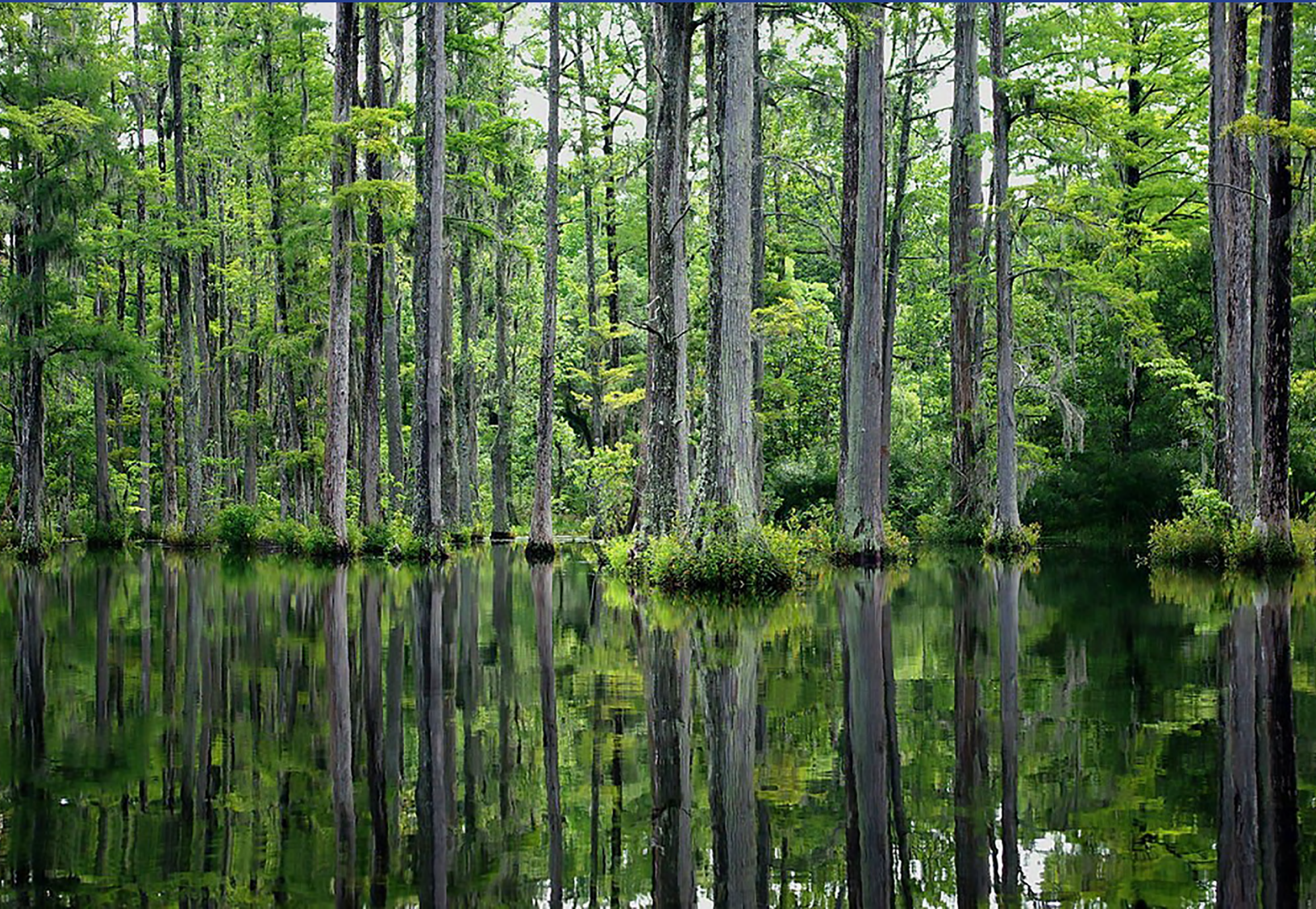


CYPRESS GARDENS



AT DEAN HALL

A Historical Booklet by Michael J. Heitzler, Ed. D.



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FOREWORD

Tourism and marketing studies consistently find that heritage and history attract visitors, home-buyers, and investors to growing communities. History impacts the self-perceptions of a place and drives the surveys that find that historic sites are the first interests of tourists. A thorough study conducted for the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism found that the most important criteria for visitors in South Carolina included interests in architecture and history. Unfortunately, few understand the long-muted story of Berkeley County, South Carolina.

Residents of Berkeley County miss opportunities to tell their story to residents and visitors. Thus, we should develop strategies that take advantage of this untapped resource. Strategies could include the establishment of the Berkeley County Historic Commission composed of interested citizens to continue the research begun by others because so much remains to be discovered, organized, and shared. The commission could oversee the maintenance of a web page and other media releases recalling significant Berkeley County events and contributions. The commission could design and erect historic markers indicating to all that they are visiting or living in a historically important part of South Carolina and the Nation. Such strategies could result in a cost-effective basis for improved public relations that emphasizes conservation and protection of historic resources. Also, initiatives to share and explain the community's long and rich heritage could be a way of finding a marketable brand such as, *Berkeley County -Cradle of the Deep South*. The County leadership should develop strategic initiatives for enjoying local history and reaping the benefits from it.

Thus, this exploration of Cypress Gardens at Dean Hall is one of many initiatives needed to help the people of Berkeley County and others understand, appreciate and benefit from the community's compelling past, an enthralling present, and an exciting future. With this in mind, I hope this rendering will make Berkeley County more complete by keeping the residents and visitors better informed and inspire those who build and protect this place today and tomorrow. But most of all, this work is a labor of love.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael James Heitzler earned a Doctor of Education Degree from the University of South Carolina. He is a Fulbright Scholar and a retired school administrator of the Berkeley County School District, South Carolina. He served as Mayor of the City of Goose Creek, Berkeley County, South Carolina from 1978 to 2018. He is the author of *Historic Goose Creek, South Carolina, 1670-1980*, published in 1983 by Southern Historical Press, Easley, South Carolina. He also wrote *Goose Creek, a Definitive History*, volume I published in 2005 and volume II published in 2006, by the History Press, Charleston, South Carolina. More recently he penned, *The Goose Creek Bridge, Gateway to Sacred Places*, published by Author House in 2013 and *The Chicken Trilogy* in 2016. The Berkeley Chamber of Commerce published his work, *George Chicken, Carolina Man of the Ages* in 2011 and the City of Goose Creek and the South Carolina Historical Society published a growing number of his articles and booklets featuring Goose Creek and Berkeley County, South Carolina.



A large bronze alligator guards the entrance to Cypress Gardens, once part of the renowned Dean Hall Plantation in Berkeley County, South Carolina. Ancient bricks molded and baked at neighboring Medway Plantation provide the sturdy presentation platform. Hundreds of alligators come home to Cypress Gardens and must be regarded cautiously. The author took this image September 10, 2020.

CYPRESS GARDENS AT DEAN HALL

The ground waters of Cypress Gardens in Berkeley County, South Carolina flowed as innumerable streams across a Carolina lowland when Alexander Nesbitt, a Baronet of Dean, Scotland arrived in 1725.¹ He, with his bride, Mary Rutherford and their three children built their Dean Hall Manor on high ground overlooking the Cooper River. They also erected a multi-purpose settlement for slave families near their expanding rice fields, and embanked the wetlands into water preserves, which evolved into the Cypress Gardens Park we enjoy today.

Dean Hall Plantation stood at the northern reach of the Cote Bas Peninsula, a fertile stretch of land between the tidal influenced Cooper and Back Rivers, approximately thirty miles from Charleston.² The Nesbitt family persistently consolidated properties on the Cote Bas Peninsula until their plantation amounted to more than 3000 acres. However, their efforts produced only marginal returns until after the American Revolution, when Cooper River commerce and innovative rice

culture greatly increased profits.

William Augustus Carson purchased Dean Hall in 1821, and he and his sons held it for eighty-eight years. During his tenure, Dean Hall produced more rice than anytime during its long legacy and it steadily improved until few places rivaled its ambiance. Carson greatly expanded the water reserves, installed sluice gates to better manage the predictable pitch of tides, and strategically harnessed the ebbs and flows of the Cooper River to grow impressive crops. With his considerable profits, he built the second Dean Hall house in the style of an English manor.

Plantation owners on the salty Cooper and Back Rivers depended upon fresh water to irrigate the rice plants and drown the nuisance weeds.³ They impounded water by damming the swamps and releasing timely floods onto potential fields.⁴ The demise of slavery after the Civil War, the Unionist strict attitudes toward the planting “nobility,” and years of forced political and social reconstruction steadily erased the profits from river side agriculture. Nevertheless, Benjamin Rufus Kittredge bought the anachronistic

1 A Baronet is a royal title granted by the King.

2 Cote Bas is a French expression referring to a smaller and less traveled road alongside a major highway. The much smaller Back River is an alternate route flowing alongside the much broader and deeper, Cooper River. Another translation, according to John D. Irving, *A Day on Cooper River*, p. 77, uses the French word for *Cote* or coast and *Bas* meaning lower. Thus, Back River formed the lower coast on a stretch of the Cooper River.

3 Samuel Gaillard Stoney, *Plantations of the Carolina Low Country*, Dover Publications Inc., New York, p. 83.

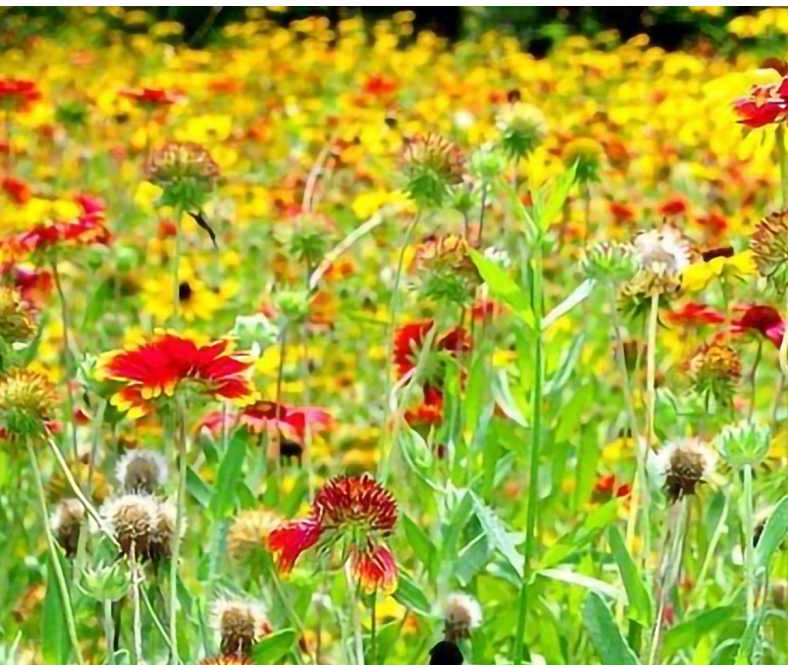
4 “A Compiled Map of Dean Hall,” surveyed by Henry Ravennel, March 1827. SCHS, Call Number 32-55-02. The surveyor identified over 500 acres of rice land in fourteen sections aside the river, north of the settlement.



plantation with the overgrown cypress preserves near the turn of the twentieth century to use as a hunting club. After decades of neglect, a large section of the Dean Hall hunting lands overgrew into a thick cypress forest ranging throughout an immense water reserve. Instead of reclaiming the hydro-system, the new owner protected the cypress forest and enhanced the land by planting thousands of azaleas, daphnia, magnolia, sweet olive, gardenia, carolina cherry, japonica, laurel, and other flowering plants to create a network of unmatched floral beauty. Benjamin Rufus Kittredge graciously opened Cypress Gardens for public enjoyment in 1932.

Today mature cypress trees (above) flourish in the black waters that once irrigated the vast Dean Hall rice fields. Visitors to Cypress Gardens stroll along the original preserve dikes remaining from the by-gone rice-growing eras. The author took this photo October 29, 2020.

Cypress knees (below) are cone-shaped growths that rise vertically from the roots of the cypress trees in the submerged sediment strata. The knees provide stability for the large trees rooted in the loose swamp substrate. The author took this photograph October 27, 2020.



Benjamin Rufus Kittredge planted thousands of blooming plants (left) in the cypress forest that provides a stunning destination for visitors. The author took this photo July 29, 2018.

Finally, the abundant land and deep navigable waters enticed E.I. de Nemours and Company to purchase much of the Cote Bas peninsula for industrial development. Seven years hence (1964), to protect Cypress Gardens from development, Benjamin Kittredge Jr. sold the stunning wetland jungle to the City of Charleston for \$1.00. Soon after, the Cooper River Industrial Park Corporation acquired what remained of the Dean Hall Estate and arranged to relocate the Nesbitt and Carson Houses off of the grounds.⁵

⁵ The deed transferring Cypress Garden to the City of Charleston, stated in part, "...Mindful that thousands of persons annually enjoy the beauty of Cypress Gardens... created in 1927 by his father, the late Benjamin R. Kittredge, and which, with the years, has become an internationally celebrated attraction of South Carolina.

During those vibrant years, Hurricane Hugo destroyed the gardens and made it unsafe for visitors until the City of Charleston repaired the immense destruction. Almost two decades later (1996), the City of Charleston gifted the natural masterpiece of cypress forests, abundant wildlife, black ponds, and thousands of flowering plants to the people of Berkeley County, who with their elected leaders treasure and protect that gift to this day.⁶

⁶ Author interview with Johnny Cribb, Berkeley County Supervisor, October 26, 2020 at Cypress Gardens.

The black waters at Cypress Gardens flow from pond to pond by way of canals beneath pedestrian overpasses. The ponds reflect the glory of the cypress forest. Image taken by author October 26, 2020.



COTE BAS PATRIARCHS AND THE GOOSE CREEK MEN

The Founding fathers of the deep-south landed in the Carolina Colony fifty years before Alexander Nesbitt settled Dean Hall.⁷ Some of those seafarers on that first ship in 1670, as well as more arriving in subsequent months and years, sailed from Barbados, a slave-based colony in the Caribbean Sea reputed to be “...the most horrifying society in the English-speaking world.”⁸ The first immigrants from Barbados pushed inland from the briny soils of the Charles Towne peninsula to claim arable properties above the tidal salt waters. Many of these early families settled along the freshwater banks of Goose Creek and Cooper River where the planters allied strategically to form a political party that contemporaries tagged the “Goose Creek Men.” The immigrants on the Cooper River lands cohered with the Goose Creek leaders to rule colonial Carolina well into

7 Although there were only a handful of Barbadians in the first fleet, approximately half of the white settlers and more than half of the enslaved Africans during the next two years came from Barbados. Between 1670 and 1690 about 54 percent of the whites who immigrated to South Carolina came from Barbados and many others emigrated from various other sugar islands in the English West Indies.

8 Colin Woodward, *American Nations, A History of the Eleven Rival Cultures of North America*, Penguin Books, Hudson Street, New York, p. 82.

the eighteenth century.⁹ They implanted their culture brought from “horrendous” Barbados and used it to dominate the social, political, and economic initiatives for centuries.¹⁰ In pursuit of fortunes, the Cooper River/Goose Creek cadre implanted a land-based aristocracy resembling a nobility. They also implemented a strict caste system and employed a myriad of ostentatious behaviors that soon dominated the entire Cooper River community where Dean Hall emerged.¹¹

During the frontier era (1670-1720) seven immigrant families settled on Cote Bas, but few established permanence. Salt water tidal intrusions suppressed agriculture and the absence of dry access forced reliance on unpredictable water

9 John Culpeper, *Draught of Ashley River*, 1671, notes “A Broad Stately Creeke [sic] that Runs many miles into the Country.” The map is among the collections of the South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

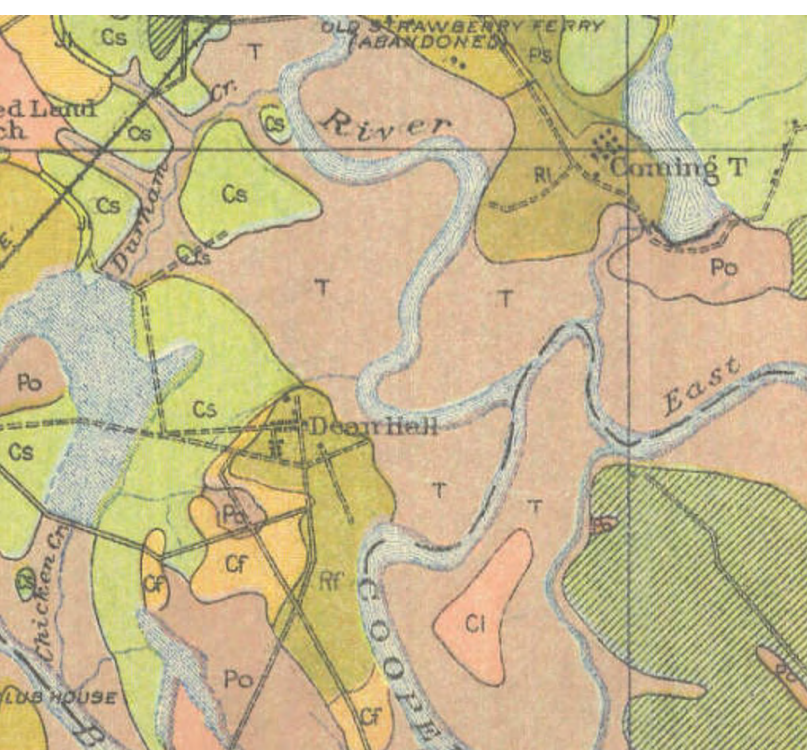
10 Woodward, p.82. During the 1650s, over 100,000 Irish children between the ages of 10 and 14 were sold as slaves in the West Indies, Virginia, and New England, of which almost half were sold to Barbadian planters. Also see: J. Handler, “Unshackled Spaces: Fugitives from Slavery and Maroon Communities in America.” Yale University: The Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance and Abolition, 12/6-7/ 2002. S. O’Callaghan, *To Hell or Barbados*. Brandon Books Pub. Ltd., 2001, pp. 55-65. A Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*. Oxford University Press. 1995, pp. 41-45, 78.

11 Woodward.

transport. The depths of the Cooper and Back Rivers prevented land passage from the south and east, while Durham and Chicken Creeks prevented dry passage from the north and west. Consequently, successful plantations failed to thrive, forcing resourceful settlers to dabble in deer skin trade with the local Native Americans. Regrettably, that early trade success devolved into the notorious Native American slave trade, dominated by the Cote Bas Patriarchs and the Goose Creek Men. They sold their native slaves to sugar plantation owners in Barbados, until Alexander Nesbitt acquired some of the Cote Bas tracts and consolidated them into his Dean Hall Estate in 1725.



The diorama in Ocmulgee National Monument Park, in Georgia depicts (above) Goose Creek planter and militia leader, Colonel James Moore, atop his mount in the left foreground. He is ahead the “Goose Creek (and Cooper River) Men” departing the Ocmulgee trading-post near modern day Macon, Georgia. He is depicted returning with hundreds of Native American slaves.



A detail of the South Carolina Soil Map (above) identifies Dean Hall in the center of the frame. Durham Creek and Chicken Creek flow from the north-west into Back River denying dry land passage. The image is taken from the Historical Soil Survey Maps of South Carolina.



This detail (above) of the Ravenel Map shows the Cote Bas Peninsula where Dean Hall ascended. Back River and the Cooper River flow together to form a peninsula and those two waterways, as well as the miles of wet headwaters allowed no dry land access. A red star added to this image for this publication indicates the location of Dean Hall, where Cypress Gardens arose. This is a detail of the *Map of the Charleston District, South Carolina*, Surveyed by Charles Vignoles and Henry Ravenel, 1820.



The popular Durham Boat Landing (left) lays near the confluence of Chicken Creek and Durham Creek that flowed into Back River. That gentle waterway washes tranquilly along the green banks of the Cote Bas Peninsula (AKA Bushy Park). Chicken Creek is named for a Trade Commissioner, Colonel George Chicken, who planted and traded near the creek. The name of Durham Creek is taken from the family from Durham, England that immigrated with and settled alongside the George Chicken family. The author took this image July 11, 2020.

The photograph (right) shows Back River washing the Cote Bas Peninsular landscape. Numerous flow ways, including Foster Creek, Medway Creek, Durham, and Chicken Creeks flow into Back River. Foster Creek kept the name of an early settler. Durham and Chicken Creek were named for contiguous landowners. Medway Creek took the name of Medway Plantation that bordered Dean Hall. The author took this image in July 2020.



DEAN HALL AT THE CUSP OF COOPER RIVER COMMERCE

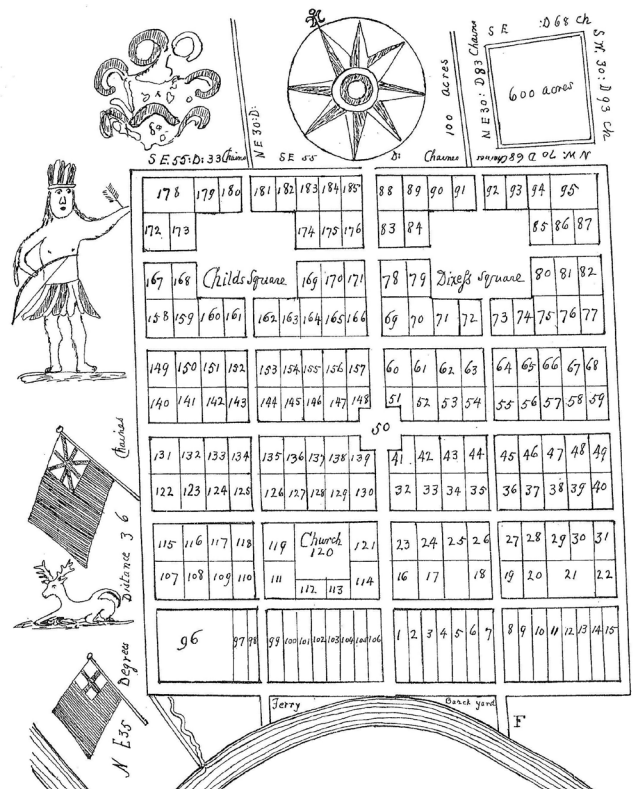
When the river commerce quickened, the neighboring Cooper River tracts transformed into agricultural giants, prompting Carolina Governor, James Glen to comment:

The Cooper River appears sometimes a kind of floating market and we have Numbers of Canoes, Boats, and Pettygues [flat bottom boats] that ply incessantly, bringing down the Country Produce to Town and returning with necessaries the Planters want...¹²

Dean Hall lay at the Cusp of Cooper River Commerce, and Alexander Nesbitt built a two-story house featuring Barbadian subtropical architectural style, including a one room depth to both floors to permit a breeze throughout the house. Their home stood boldly near numerous innovative industries and plantations of which many were visible from the Nesbitt manor piazza.¹³

Immediately to the north of Dean Hall ranged Childsbury Town, a planned community with a church, school, fortress, boat landing, general store, racetrack, many businesses, and residential lots. A busy ferryboat conveyed passengers and produce

to and from Childsbury across the western branch of the Cooper River within sight of Dean Hall. Several manor style homes stood grandly within view from Dean Hall; and to the east, stood a large hydro-powered rice mill looming near the Cooper River “T” where the western and eastern branches of that waterway converged to form the deep, wide, and busy Cooper River.



The plat describes the planned community named Childsbury. James Child founded Childsbury as a planned community spanning a busy section of the Cooper River within sight of the entrance avenue to Dean Hall.¹⁴

14 Henry A. M. Smith, *Childsbury*, The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine Vol. 15, No. 2 (April, 1914), pp. 107-112, SCHS, Charleston, South Carolina.

12 Max Savelle, *A History of Colonial America*, 1942, Holt Rinehart and Winston, Inc. p. 191.

13 “Near the dock are the sunken remains of a 19th century steam vessel. Also, the hull of an approximately 60-foot-long double ended sailing vessel.” Author interview with Drew Ruddy, Berkeley Museum Executive.



Strawberry Chapel (above) overlooked Childsbury on the northern side of the western branch of the Cooper River. The image is courtesy of Brandon Coffey.



A nineteenth century photograph (left) shows the Strawberry Ferry crossing the western branch of the Cooper River within sight of Dean Hall Plantation. Image is courtesy of the University of South Carolina, Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.



The author took this photograph (above) on July 20, 2017. The image shows the interior ruins of the Stokes Rice Mill. The innovated agricultural methods of that era employed the pitch of tide to fill large water impoundments where one could open the gates to allow rushing waters to turn wheels that milled the rice on the grist stones. The innovative invention cleaned the husks off of innumerable rice kernels. The Stokes Rice Mill stood across the river and in sight of the brick, rice and lumber mills at Dean Hall.



The author took this photograph (above) of the brick ferry landing July 11, 2016. Bricks and wooden beams re-enforced the docking port. The landing and main avenue to Dean Hall were visible from the ferry dock.



A photograph (above) taken by the author July 11, 2016 shows the remnants of Sullivan's Landing (AKA Read Landing) near the ferry port. That landing was the Cooper River gateway to bustling Childsbury Town.



The image(left) reveals a lady at Dean Hall using a woven basket to winnow rice. Winnowing requires a breeze to blow away the nuisance dust from the milled kernels. Behind her is a billowing tool leaning against the wall that she used to pound the grains and remove the husks. This labor-intensive pounding and winnowing processes were avoided when the grist mill was erected at Dean Hall. The mill used water released from the preserve to turn a large wheel that drove the grist that cleaned the husks off each kernel. Winnowing was the last chore before consuming the nutritious grain or loading it in bags for export. Note the thick dust rising from the winnowing basket. Image is courtesy of the University of South Carolina, Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina. This photograph is from the Berkeley County Photograph Collection.



A Dean Hall couple relax aside their cabin (above). A long row of slave quarters lined the entrance road to the Nesbitt Manor House. Most Dean Hall slaves were multi-generational workers with adults, children and grandchildren serving until emancipation. Image is courtesy of the University of South Carolina, the Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina. This photograph is from the Berkeley County Photograph Collection.

The Nesbitt family worked their grand estate until it was well known as a model of success. They enjoyed their two-story brick house at the terminus of their avenue from the north and built a brick grist mill similar to the Stocks Mill across the river. The Dean Hall grist mill cleaned innumerable rice kernels aside the timber mill used to saw construction lumber.¹⁵

Architecturally, the Nesbitt house was fashioned after typical townhouses in Barbados where the Caribbean breezes washed through the narrow, single room deep structure to refresh the occupants. Also, the encircling piazza enabled the owner to keep an eye on the work in the rice fields, the upland plantings, the grist and lumber mill near the river, and the slave quarters. The house featured a spacious, multi-story plan built over a raised basement where the kitchens and storerooms supported the busy household. The roof line was a medium cross gable flanked front and rear with dormers.

15 J. Russell Cross, *Historic Rambling's Through Berkeley*, 1985, p.88. The R.L. Bryan Company printed the work. The original Nisbett House was moved to Moncks Corner in the twentieth century where it stands today.

During the years following the American Revolution, Alexander Nesbitt worked 89 slaves with his wife, daughter and two sons. His oldest son, Sir John Nesbitt worked 85 slaves at Dean Hall.¹⁶ Undoubtedly, the Nesbitt family enjoyed viewing the wide panorama from their manor in the center of the busy Cooper River Community and they were shocked to learn that as the Revolutionary War raged, the patriot governor, on behalf of the General Assembly of South Carolina, assigned representatives in 1782 to identify land holding loyalists. They placed Nesbitt's property on the Confiscated Estate List due to suspicious disloyalty to the patriot cause but removed Dean Hall from that list the following year after hearing further testimony. Thus, the manor and land remained in the Nesbitt family almost one hundred years, until John Nesbitt, grandson, sold all of the 3,100 acres, to William A. Carson in 1821.¹⁷

16 United States Census, St. Johns Parish, South Carolina, 1790.

17 Charleston County Office Building title search found that Alexander Nisbett purchased the property in 1725, he added more acreage and consolidated the estate in 1733. John Nisbett inherited his father estate in 1753 and by 1779 the land was worked by the great grandson, John Nesbitt II. For drawings of embanked irrigation structures see SCHS call number 32-91-08.



Pursuant to the request of Alexander Nesbitt Jr., Samuel A. Ruddock drew a description (left) of 3,100 acres of Dean Hall Plantation in 1811. This detail of that plat shows significant structures on the eastern and western branch of the Cooper River, including the Dean Hall settlement and Manor House. An arrow on the left margin was added to this publication to identify the ferry road. The arrow on the right indicates location of Stokes Rice Mill. The plat is courtesy of the South Carolina Historical Society (SCHS) accession number 32-50-04/ 32-139.¹⁸

18 The detail of the plat indicates the Edward Harleston Huger House, Daniel Harleston Huger House, Cooper River “T” where the western and eastern branches of the river converge, Balls [Elias] House, Dr. William Read’s House, Strawberry Chapel, Bath House, Strawberry Ferry, Dean Hall, and Rice Fields, A red star for this publication marks the site of the cypress swamp approximate to the Dean Hall Manor.

A detail of the 1811 plat (right) shows the Dean Hall Settlement. The main house stood at the terminus of an avenue approaching from the north at the western branch of the Cooper River. Twenty “Negro Houses,” line the main avenue and several outbuildings clustered nearby including a large rice barn, corn and rice fields, various workshops and a water powered grist mill. The avenue to the main house reached to the western branch of the Cooper River within sight of Childsbury Town. Samuel Abiel Ruddock (1767?-1828), surveyed. Plat is courtesy of the South Carolina Historical Society (SCHS) accession number 32-50-04.



ERA OF INNOVATION

When William Augustus Carson acquired Dean Hall, he energized the languishing plantation by building a strikingly attractive new home constructed with Samuel P. Stoney's Medway Plantation bricks, as was the Nesbitt home.¹⁹ Immediately after moving into the new manor house, Carson deepened and expanded the impounded water preserves.²⁰ He also increased the durability of the water gaits by erecting solid granite sills for the trunks. The obvious improvements prompted one observer in 1842 to proclaim:

It (Dean Hall) resembles a well ordered village more than that of a single plantation. The residence of the proprietor - the condition of the fields - the banks - the white and cleanly appearance of the negro houses - the mill and thrashing machine in complete order, all excite a strong feeling of admiration, and stamp at once the proprietor as an experienced and skillful planter.²¹

William Augustus Carson married Caroline Petigru and reared two sons: William and James. The house they erected featured seven brick arches on each side to support the columns of the encircling

piazza. From his elevated vantage William Carson observed the nearby slave quarters and his workers in the cotton, corn, and rice fields.²² He also viewed the Dean Hall grist mill that cleaned the rice kernels and turned saw blades to cut lumber to sell or use locally.²³ The Carson's imported sugar, molasses, rum and much more while selling rice, cotton, lumber, horses, and mules. Additionally, Carson sometimes marched slaves to nearby plantations to work for prearranged amounts of money or traded labor as warranted.²⁴ Dean Hall "servants" often traveled five miles to the Bethlehem Baptist Church on Moncks Corner Road to enjoy Sunday service. The Bethlehem Baptist Church, *Book of Covenants* notes several Dean Hall servants were baptized at the Bethlehem Baptist Church.²⁵ Dean Hall arose as one of the most notable settlements in South Carolina and was touted as a model community that supported hundreds of employed and enslaved workers.

19 Medway bricks weighed six pounds each and measured 9x4.5x2.5 inches. They were used throughout the Carolina lowcountry including Dean Hall and Fort Sumter.

20 "Plat of a section of Dean Hall and White Hall," showing 130 acres of impounded rice fields where Cypress Gardens finally arose. SCHS call number 33-72-15 and "A Plat of Dean Hall Plantation," March 1827 by Henry Ravenel.

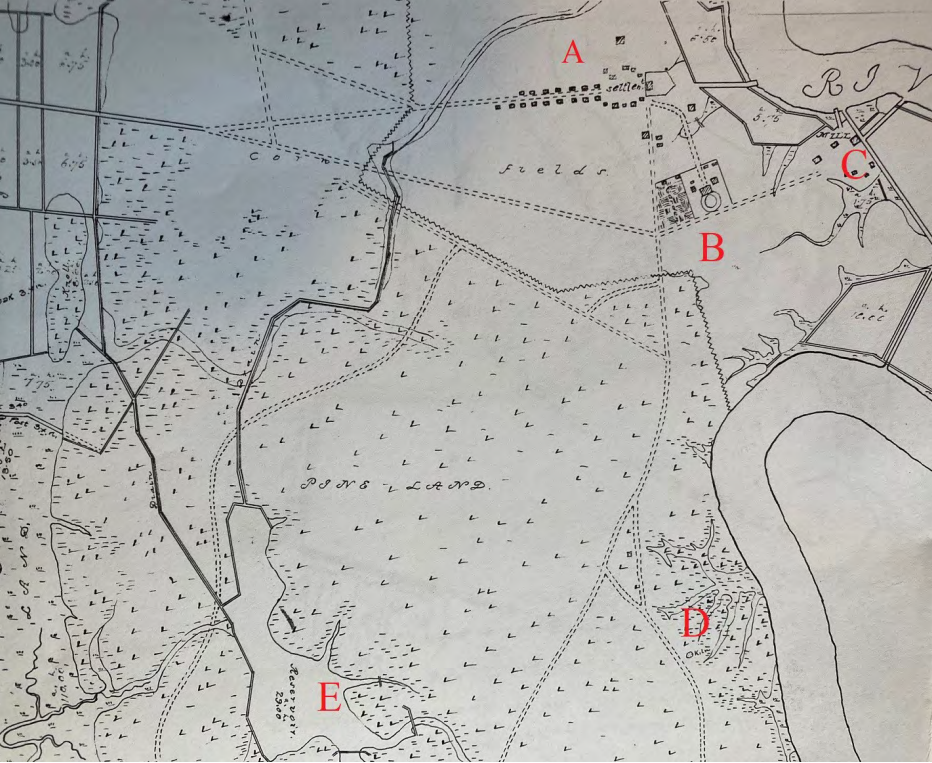
21 John D. Irving, M.D. *A Day on Cooper River*, The R. L. Bryan Company, Columbia, South Carolina, 2007, pp. 25,26.

22 See SCHS call number 142-52-18 and "Dean Hall Reflects Rice Culture in the 19th Century," Charleston News and Courier, 20 VII, 1970.

23 Dean Hall Sawmill and Plantation financial reports 1867, SCHS Accession no. 33/118-03 pp. 85-95.

24 Dean Hall financial reports 1867, SCHS Accession Number 33/118-03.

25 The *Book of the Covenant* for the Bethlehem Baptist Church records the names of a dozen "servants" from Dean Hall that received the Sacrament of Baptism. The book is among the primary collections of the Charleston Museum, Charleston.



A detail of a plat (left) shows the original location of the Dean Hall and Carson houses. Alpha-letters are added to this publication for clarity. The letter “A” indicates the Nesbitt house. The letter “B” indicates the Carson House. The letter “C” indicates the location of the Dean Hall thrashing grist mill. The letter D identifies a kiln for extracting naval stores. Letter E indicates a 29-acre water reserve, from which Cypress Gardens eventually expanded to 179 acres. The plat is courtesy of the South Carolina Historical Society (SCHS) accession number 32-50-04. Author interview with Drew Ruddy, Berkeley Museum Executive and SCUBA diver. “Near the dock are the sunken remains of a 19th century steam vessel...and the hull of an approximately 60-foot-long double ended sailing vessel.



William Carson enjoys a cigar (left) while standing on a Dean Hall pedestrian bridge, circa 1850. Image is courtesy of the University of South Carolina, the Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina. This photograph is from the Berkeley County Photograph Collection.

The photograph (below) shows one of the several “outbuildings” near the main house that supported the Dean Hall enterprises. Image is courtesy of the University of South Carolina, the Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina. This photograph is from the Berkeley County Photograph Collection.





Another detail of the plat (left) shows the position of the Carson home relative to the original Nesbitt house. Both manor entrance avenues reached north toward the western branch of the Cooper River within sight of Childsbury Town. Another roadway connected the two homes. The entrance avenue divides slave houses and terminates at the Nesbitt Manor. Outbuildings such as hay barns and workshops stand near the main house. The Carson house stands at the end of a connector road and features several outbuildings. A garden or orchard is indicated next to the house. The "Mill" is noted near a trunk gate leading to the Copper River. The map is courtesy of SCHS, accession number 35-55-02. Author interview with Drew Ruddy, Berkeley Museum Executive, and SCUBA diver, December 4, 2020. "At the plantation landing at Dean Hall there is a ... fairly intact crib dock."



William Augustus Carson renovated the ancient plantation grounds and built a new house shown in this image (above). Carson and his family resided there until Benjamin Rufus Kittredge acquired the old plantation and occupied the home with his family until 1951, merely six years before the Cooper River Industrial Park Company purchased the house and 1,325 acres.²⁶

²⁶ Samuel Gaillard Stoney, *Plantations of the South Carolina Low Country*. Dover Publication, Inc., New York, 1938, 1939, 1964, p. 226.



The enthralling reflections on the black waters of Cypress Gardens (left) greet visitors at every turn through the immense park. The gardens expanded to 179 acres of natural beauty during the Carson stewardship. The author took this image October 30, 2020.



The photograph (above) shows William Augustus Carson with his sons, William (standing at right margin) and James (sitting), enjoying their fireplace with house maid and dog. This image is from the Berkeley County Photograph Collection, Accession no. 1001.27, folder 1001 at South Caroliniana Library.



Guides accompanied the hunters because they were intimately familiar with the game habits (left). Guides also returned with the carcasses and butchered the game at the end of the successful hunts. Berkeley County Photograph Collection, Accession no. 1001.27, Folder 1001 Berkeley, housed at South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

These ladies posed (right) by a heap of rice grasses. Their hats and long flowing dresses kept the Carolina heat sufferable. Berkeley County Photograph Collection, Accession no. 1001.27, Folder 1001 Berkeley, housed at South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

Soon after the Carson family moved into their new manor house, the overseer with his family, relocated to the original Nesbitt home and resided there for more than a decade, until he died in 1834 from “cancer of the face.”²⁷ “A man named (NFN) Herron...” resided with his wife and children in the ancient manor house during most of the 1840s. Charlie Breaker assumed the overseer responsibilities in 1854 and served as landlord until the plantation was sold three years hence.²⁸ Soon after the last occupant departed, the old Nesbitt manor house deteriorated beyond repair and was left to molder in the intruding forest.



²⁷ “Notes for Mrs. Webber.” SCHS.

²⁸ “Notes for Mrs. Webber.”

Standing holding the horse rein (right) is “Old Joe” a valuable servant who worked many years at Dean Hall. He died when W.A. Carson owned Dean Hall and was buried under a “tablet” as a tribute to the “faithful slave.” The man left of center is the nephew of Carson. He resided at the Dean Hall Plantation for two years and stated that he learned more about rice planting from “Old Joe” than anyone.²⁹ Berkeley County Photograph Collection, Accession no. 1001.27, Folder 1001, housed at South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.



29 “Notes for Mrs. Webber.”



“Old Joe” holds the horse rein (left) in preparation for a hunt. Also, a skilled planter, Joe carefully employed the embanked water preserves to irrigate the crops. This photograph is from the Berkeley County Photograph Collection, Accession no. 1001.33, Folder 1001 Berkeley, housed at South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

“Colonel Jim” (James Carson, son of William) of Dean Hall, poses (right) in hunting cloths circa 1827. This photograph is from the Berkeley County Photograph Collection, Accession no. 1001.2, Folder 1001 Berkeley, housed at South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.





William Carson Jr. rests on the well case while he feeds turkeys. This photograph (left) is from the Berkeley County Photograph Collection, Accession no. 1001.30, Folder 1001 Berkeley (23-43), housed at South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

Samuel P. Stoney of Medway Plantation poses (right) while mounted upon his prize stallion. The photograph was taken in front of the second Dean Hall Plantation main house built by William Augustus Carson. This photograph is from the Berkeley County Photograph Collection, Accession no. 1001.25, Folder 1001 Berkeley, housed at South Caroliniana Library.





The photograph (left) shows three slaves and five dogs at the well near their house. This photograph is from the Berkeley County Photograph Collection, Accession no. 1001.32, Folder 1001 Berkeley (23-43), housed at South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina

The photo (right) is entitled, "Charley and Button." The image shows an ox pulling a man in a wagon through the main avenue gates at Dean Hall. This photograph is from the Berkeley County Photograph Collection, Accession no. 1001.41, Folder 1001 Berkeley, housed at South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.



William and James Carson, sons of William Augustus Carson previous owner of Dean Hall estate often used the old plantation as a hunting club. William Carson Jr. stands in front of the Carson Manor while two hunting dogs lay proudly before their fallen prey. The image (left) is Courtesy of the University of South Carolina, Caroliniana Library, Columbia, SC., Accession no.1001.23, Folder 1001 Berkeley, University of South Carolina.



A young man poses (above) with his hunting bounty on Dean Hall Plantation, circa 1870. Two hunting dogs relax at his side and on his lap. The image is Courtesy of the Caroliniana Library, Columbia, SC., Accession no.1001.23, Folder 1001 Berkeley, University of South Carolina.



Patience, a Dean Hall resident tosses grain to a flock of turkeys at the hand pump well, circa 1870. While the birds are eating, one turkey stares suspiciously at the hunting rifle leaning against the well foundation. The image is Courtesy of the Caroliniana Library, Columbia, SC., Accession no.1001.23, Folder 1001 Berkeley, University of South Carolina.

The Civil War ended slavery and by that collapsed the dynamic agricultural system on a especially prosperous section of the Cooper River. Union gun boats destroyed the Dean Hall grist mill putting a halt to all marketable rice production.³⁰ Soon

³⁰ SCHS, Manuscript of Simons and Simons plantation records concerning repairs to the Dean Hall grist mill, circa 1865, 0431.07-02.

after the conflict, the land at Dean Hall reverted to wilderness and the crucial water preserves with trunk gates and dikes overgrew and fell into the wild wetland forest. William Senior served one term in the South Carolina State House of Representatives (1834-1835) and died four years before the Civil War commenced. His two sons served as principal managers, but within five years his executors sold the entirety of the estate to neighboring Elias Ball. Confederate Securities were exchanged to make the purchase, but the transfer was found illegal by the Supreme Court, allowing the Carson family to reclaim their ancestral home place.³¹ The sons, William and James returned to the plantation from time to time to plant the old fields and harvest timber, but little came of their efforts, as they aged and typically used their family estate as a hunting preserve where great fowl quarries, peacocks, horses, and hounds amused them for another decade.³²

³¹ John D. Irving p. 27, Charleston County Office Building property titles and transfers. William A. Carson purchased Dean Hall in 1821. The property was left to his wife and children in 1856. Elias Ball purchased it in 1857, and six years later William McBurney and Alfred L. Gillespie acquired all of it. In 1886 the Supreme Court oversaw the foreclosure and transferred all rights to it to James P. and William Carson. See "Supreme Court of the United States", October 1885, Number 245, Caroline Carson verse Mary A. Hyatt. SCHS PAM 347, 1885 and Caroline Carson verse C.T. Dunham, SCHS PAM 1887.

³² Irving p. 27.

BENJAMIN RUFUS KITTREDGE'S GREATEST GIFT

Soon after the turn of the twentieth century (1909), Benjamin Rufus Kittredge with Elizabeth his bride, purchased Dean Hall from James Carson. Benjamin Kittredge bought the property as a hunting preserve, but the stunning beauty of the cypress forest in the tangled wetlands enticed him to create a park for its preservation and public enjoyment. Consequently, he planted flowers along miles of water preserves creating what is known today as Cypress

Gardens and opened the overgrown but beautiful landscape for public viewing in 1932.³³

³³ In 1909 Benjamin and Elizabeth Carson bought the tract. Elizabeth acquired the estate after Benjamin's death and it later conveyed to their son Benjamin R. Kittredge, Jr. in 1953.

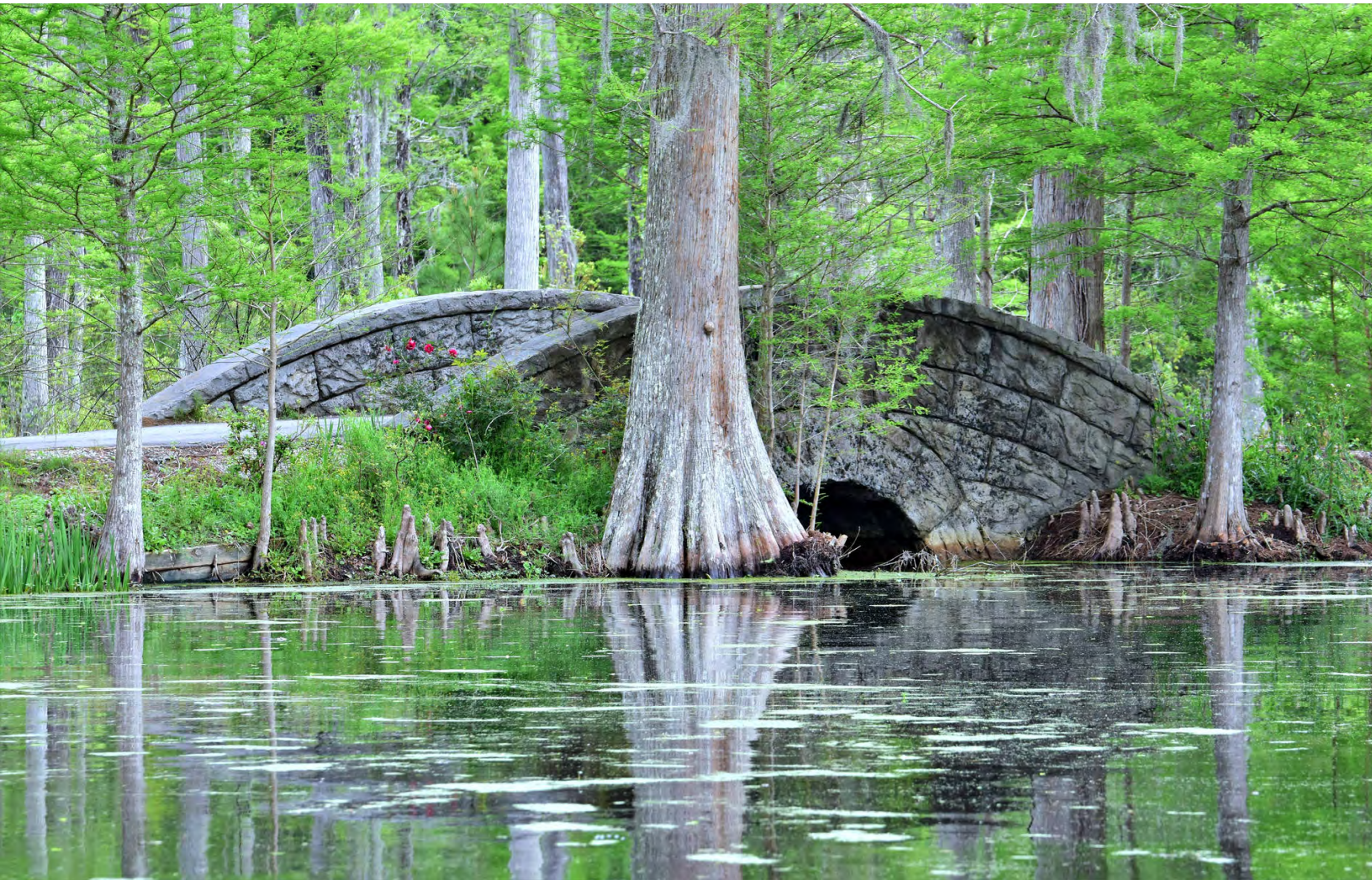
Benjamin Rufus Kittredge rests in his carriage aside the house that William Augustus Carson designed and built. Benjamin Rufus Kittredge and his family resided there until 1951. This photograph is from the Berkeley County Photograph Collection, Accession no. 1001.26, Folder 1001, Berkeley, housed at South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.



Benjamin and Elizabeth Kittredge grew thousands of flowering plants throughout the abandoned reserve where masses of mature cypress trees rose in profusion. They created a pedestrian walkway several miles long using bridges to connect the ponds until it promised to be “the most beautiful garden ...in America.”³⁴

34 Irving, p. 29.

Large and small bridges connect visitors to dozens of flooded ponds in the cypress preserve. This water level view shows the stone arch that shores up the pedestrian crossover. Visitors enjoy picturesque views along 3.5 miles of walking paths looping throughout the gardens. Image photographed by the author on October 26, 2020.





Benjamin R. Kittredge set aside shaded ground under a Christian Cross for his family burial sites. One stone reads: Elizabeth Maynard Marshal/ wife of Benjamin Rufus Kittredge / May 25, 1873 / May 6, 1959. Another stone reads: Benjamin Rufus Kittredge / October 11, 1859 / May 31, 1951 / From the water forest / he created the beauty/ of these surrounding / Cypress Gardens. The photograph (left) is among the collections of the author.

Benjamin Kittredge died in 1951 and is buried in Cypress Gardens. His son, Benjamin Jr. inherited the plantation and gardens, and after his death, grandson Benjamin Kittredge, III sold the Carson plantation house along with 1,325 acres to the Cooper River Industrial Park Company. In 1963, Benjamin Kittredge, Jr. sold the expanded 162-acre Cypress Gardens to the City of Charleston for \$1.00.³⁵

³⁵ Benjamin Kittredge III, 1900-1981.; Kittredge family papers, ca. 1888-1958.1888 - 1955; Available at South Carolina Historical Society manuscript (1228.00)



When the City of Charleston acquired Cypress Gardens, dozens of post cards featured images (above) of the magnificent park. The postcard displayed above is entitled, "Rustic Bridge in Cypress Gardens, Charleston, S.C." Accession: Cypress Gardens, Post Cards, Caroliniana Library, Columbia, SC. Alberttype Company, Lanneau's Art Store, 1915, Accession No. 12239.2.



Photograph (left) taken near the middle of the twentieth century shows a view of one of many bridges in Cypress Gardens. Photographs WPA (Works Project Administration) BK-CG (1-10), Works Progress Administration Photograph Collection: South Carolina Places.

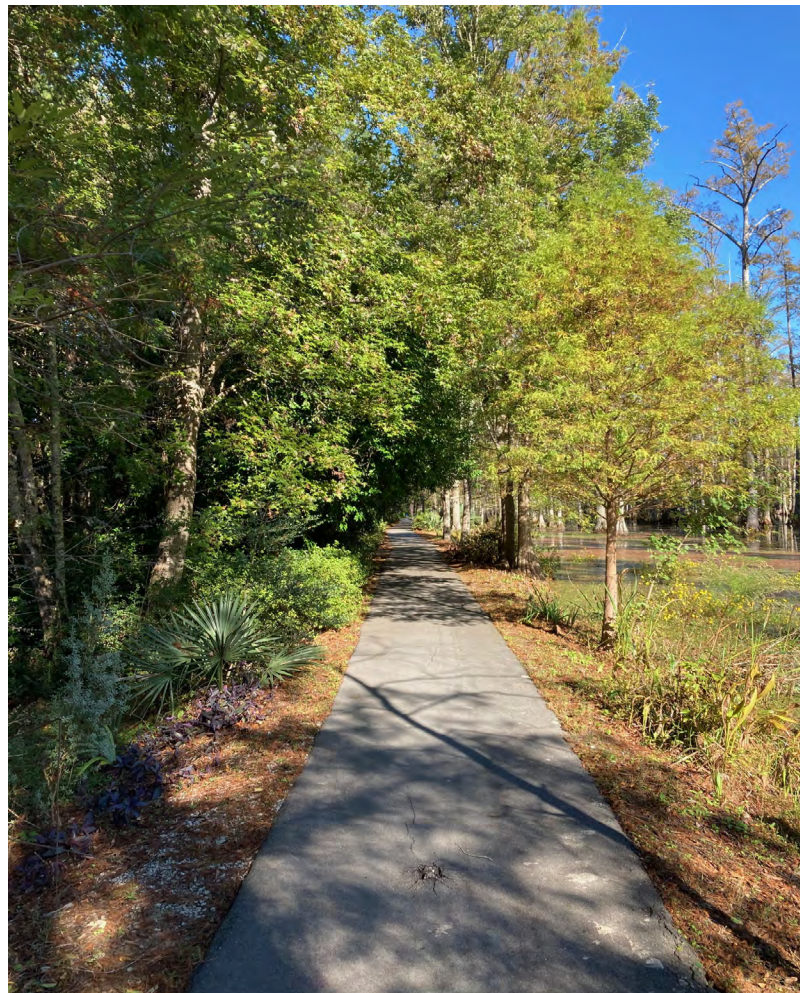


Today, the Nesbitt House (left) stands boldly on Old Highway 52 in the Town of Moncks Corner. The house, built by Alexander Nesbitt at Dean Hall Plantation was relocated to Moncks Corner in 1967. Restoration was completed in 1968. The photograph is among the collections of the author.

Footpaths (below) reach for miles, never departing from magnificent views. The photograph is among the collections of the author.

The original Alexander Nesbitt house became weather worn, overgrown and fallen but was recovered from the intruding woods in 1967 and renovated. Two centuries before, Alexander Nesbitt obtained the bricks to erect the Dean Hall House from the kilns at Medway Plantation, aside Durham Creek, and west of Cote Bas. The restored two story, one room wide structure was relocated to Highway 52 in the Town of Moncks Corner. The Barbadian style house was reopened a year later and under the piazza and arcade stood the kitchens, and storerooms.³⁶ In 2022, the offices of Berkeley County Parks, Recreation, Tourism and Farm and Land Services, relocated to the ancient manor.

36 Stoney, p. 82.





Unforgettable facilities for weddings, receptions, reunions, and much more are available for rent. The photograph is among the collections of the author.

Three years after the Nesbitt house was moved to Moncks Corner, E.I. DuPont de Nemours and Company purchased the house that William Augustus Carson built along with 2,100 acres. Their plan was to raze the old brick manor in order to build an industrial complex. Many objected with that plan resulting in a nomination to place the house on the National Register hoping that this lofty status might help preserve it. However, Commodore Charles C. Baggs purchased the building and decided to relocate it to his property in Beaufort County. The grand abode was dismantled, loaded onto trucks, and delivered to Tommy John Plantation. Three flatbed trucks carried the house framing, 20,000 bricks, tons of doors, windows, and other structural items with which they re-erected the house in Beaufort County using precise measurements and photographs

of the original.³⁷ In 2007, DuPont built a new Kevlar manufacturing plant at Dean Hall and seven years hence consolidated more.³⁸ Today the Cote Bas Peninsula is generally known as Bushy Park, the home of expanding industries and the site of increasingly popular Cypress Gardens where many interests swirl including the entertainment industry. The popular movie entitled “The Patriot” starring Mel Gibson, used Cypress Gardens as a relevant back drop. The church facade built for the movie in the cypress preserve, calls back to the Revolutionary War Era. Other productions that employed the gardens was the

37 J. Russell Cross, p. 90. “Dean Hall Plantation House to be Dismantled, Moved.” Charleston Post and Courier, August 20, 1971. Accession number SCHS 30-15-11.

38 Warren L. Wise, *DuPont Wants to Sell 305 Acres at Berkeley Plant Site* (Charleston, SC: The Post & Courier, August 24, 2014), Robert B. Cuthbert and Stephen G. Hoffius, editors, *Northern Money, Southern Land: The Lowcountry Plantation Sketches of Chlotilde R. Martin* (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009)



The popular movie titled “The Patriot” starring Mel Gibson used Cypress Gardens as a relevant back drop. The imitation church façade in the cypress preserve calls back to the Revolutionary War Era. The photograph is among the collections of the author.

television mini-series, “The North and the South,” and the movies, “Swamp Thing,” and “The Notebook.”

A 2015 storm caused massive flooding that devastated the properties. Exhaustive efforts to reclaim the gardens were severely hampered by subsequent hurricanes and tropical storms that slowed the repair efforts and delayed the park reopening until 2019. That year, Berkeley County Supervisor, Johnny Cribb was elected to lead Berkeley County and soon after took a vital interest in the park’s reclamation,

proclaiming modestly that “Cypress Gardens is not only a treasure for Berkeley County, but a destination for people around the state, country and world.”³⁹

³⁹ The Post and Courier, October 1, 2020, Andrew Miller article entitled, *Once in Deep Trouble, Cypress Gardens Thriving*, p. A1.



Cypress Gardens (left) welcomes you to visit and enjoy its unmatched beauty. Cypress Gardens is not only a treasure for Berkeley County but a favored destination for people around the State, Country and World. The photograph is among the collections of the author.



The Dean Hall Event and Convention Center (above) accommodates 250 people in an especially interesting section of the Cypress Gardens Park.



Samuel Gaillard Stoney drew this map (left) to accompany his book entitled "A Day on Cooper River." A detail of the map shows Dean Hall near two significant bends in the wide waterway. The map is entitled, "Map Showing Plantations along the Cooper River as they were in the year 1842."

CONCLUSION

Cypress Gardens at Dean Hall Plantation evolved into the epitome of natural beauty during a three-hundred-year saga of plantation successes and failures. The wild cypress forests with sprawling and flowering undergrowth emerged boldly to stand at the cusp of the new world nobility. The law of primogeniture required that all estate lands be passed to the oldest son. Many second and later sons opted to acquire their own properties in the new world and like their oldest brother, they considered themselves “close to royalty.”

The first Europeans to settle along the shores of the Cooper River joined with the neighboring Goose Creek Men to overwhelm the native tribes and rule the Carolina Colony for more than fifty years. During those five decades, more second sons from Barbados and England immigrated to the Carolina Colony bringing with them a unique culture that rapidly swept the shores of the Cooper River. The culture of nobility and class privilege drove the plantation enterprises where large numbers of laborers supported the endeavors that revolutionized Carolina. During the first century of occupation, the cypress forest received little attention except as a seasonal hunting preserve; nevertheless, subsequent owners recognized the unique nature of the Dean Hall wetlands and envisioned a cypress park that no other place could rival.

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TIMELINE

- 1725 – Alexander Nesbitt came to Carolina and began to build a house. He named the plantation Dean Hall after his home in Dean, Scotland.
- 1732 – Alexander Nesbitt married Mary Rutherford and reared three sons: Henry, John, and Alexander.
- 1744 – Alexander and Mary returned to England. The plantation was conveyed to Anthony White as caretaker.
- 1750 – Alexander and Mary Nesbitt returned to Carolina.
- 1753 – Alexander Nesbitt died and buried in St Phillip’s Churchyard. His will stated that his real and personal property were to go to his eldest son, Henry. However, Henry did not live to inherit the property and it was divided between Alexander’s two other sons, John, and Alexander. Neither son lived on the plantation but their mother, Mary, continued to live there.
- 1778 or 1779 – John Nesbitt’s two sons went to live with their grandmother at Dean Hall.
- 1782 – With the Revolutionary War raging, the Nesbitt’s property was confiscated because of their allegiance to the British crown.
- 1783 – Dean Hall was removed from the Confiscation list.
- 1821 – John Nesbitt, the grandson, sold the plantation consisting of 3,100 acres to William Augustus Carson.
- 1827 – William Carson built a house at Dean Hall as well as significantly improving the rice fields.
- 1841 – William Augustus Carson married Caroline Petigru. They reared two children: William and James.
- 1856 – William Augustus Carson died. The plantation was sold by his estate’s executors to Elias Ball for Confederate Securities.
- Caroline Petigru Carson, William Carson’s widow, filed a lawsuit to recover Dean Hall as Confederate Securities contained no value.

- 1883 – The US Supreme Court declared Caroline Petigru Carson owner of Dean Hall finding that the executors of her husband’s estate had no right to accept anything except legal tender for the sale of the plantation.
- Caroline’s sons, William and James attempted to improve the old plantation but accomplished little.
- 1909 – Benjamin Rufus Kittredge purchased the plantation from James Carson. He modernized the house and created Cypress Gardens.
- 1932 – Benjamin Kittredge opened Cypress Gardens to the public.
- 1951 – Benjamin Kittredge died and was buried in Cypress Gardens. His son, Benjamin Kittredge, Jr., inherited the plantation with the gardens.
- 1957 – Cooper River Industrial Park Company bought the Carson plantation house along with 1,325 acres.
- 1963 – Benjamin Kittredge, Jr. sold the 162-acre Cypress Gardens to the City of Charleston for \$1.00.
- 1963-Benjamin Kittredge used the land for a duck hunting reserve. During the depression more than 200 men constructed 4.5 miles of trails through the swamp. It was opened to the public in 1932.
- 1963 – Kittredge’s son donated the property to the City of Charleston.
- 1989 –Hurricane Hugo severely damaged the park, forcing it to close for a year. Berkeley County took over ownership when the City of Charleston no longer wanted to maintain the gardens.
- 2015 – Historic flooding greatly impacted the botanical preserve.
- 2015 – Announcement that Cypress Gardens would be closed indefinitely following an assessment of millions of dollars of damage.
- 2016- Cypress Gardens officials applied for Federal Emergency Management assistance with hopes to reopen by the summer of 2016.
- 2019- Cypress Gardens reopened after nearly four years of closure.

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CYPRESS GARDENS

The 170-acre of preserves and gardens is located at 3030 Cypress Gardens Road, Moncks Corner, South Carolina. The centerpiece of the garden is an 80 acre black water swamp, shaded by hundreds of bald cypress and tupelo trees accessible by way of small rowing boats and hiking trails.