

The Ashley River Plantations

Three plantations – Middleton Place, Magnolia and Drayton Hall – are along the Ashley River's west bank upstream from the site of the original colony. The story of these three estates and the families that lived there mirrors the history of South Carolina – from its colonial beginnings, through the American Revolution and Civil wars. Today, they are nationally-recognized heritage sites that draw visitors from around the world who come to admire their formal gardens and historic houses.

Middleton Place Plantation

In 1678 Edward Middleton emigrated from Barbados to the Carolina colony, where he was appointed as a proprietary deputy and an associate justice. Having been a widower for an extended period, Middleton married Sarah Fowell in 1680. The following year, Sarah gave birth to their only child, Arthur, who served as governor of South Carolina from 1725 – 1730.

Arthur Middleton's son, Henry, was born in the colony at The Oaks, the family's plantation in St. James Goose Creek Parish. When Arthur Middleton died in 1737, Henry inherited land in England, Barbados and South Carolina. In 1741 Henry married Mary Williams, whose dowry included the plantation property that would become Middleton Place.

During the years prior to the American Revolution, Henry Middleton expanded his land holdings, and eventually became one of South Carolina's wealthiest planters. He also served as a president of the Continental Congress but resigned before the Declaration of Independence was signed. His son, Arthur Middleton (born June 1742), signed the document.

During the siege of Charleston, British troops ransacked Middleton Place and captured and imprisoned Arthur Middleton. Arthur was released in 1781, and two years later the surrender terms removing British troops from the Southern colonies was signed at Middleton.

The plantation suffered more destruction during the American Civil War, as Union troops burned the main house, north flanker and part of the south flanker. The soldiers also killed and ate five water buffalo that had been imported to the plantation from Constantinople for use in the rice fields. The remaining six water buffalo were stolen, only to turn up later in Central Park Zoo.

The Middleton family made a modest recovery following the war, allowing them to make minor repairs to the plantation; however, the walls of the main house and north flanker were toppled by an earthquake in 1886. The house and gardens lay in disrepair until the early 1900s, when John Julius Pringle Smith (great- great- great- grandson of Henry Middleton) began replanting and reworking the gardens, eventually earning recognition as a historic landmark and boasting "the most interesting and important garden in the United States."

Magnolia Plantation and Gardens

About 60 Draytons lived in Barbados, mostly in St. Michael and Christ Church parishes. But in a 1996 interview the late Barbados historian Peter Campbell says he doubts that Thomas Drayton Jr. – founder of the Magnolia plantation – was among them.

Campbell, who has done exhaustive research on the Drayton family history, talks about those 17th century settlers as if he knew them personally. Thomas Drayton Jr., he says, came to the Carolina colony around the end of April 1679 and developed a large plantation. Thomas Drayton Jr. did not live in Barbados, Campbell argues.

A Thomas Drayton lived in Barbados in the 1600s, but Campbell speculates that Thomas Drayton Jr., whom he calls Thomas of Carolina, sailed from England to Barbados and purchased a ticket in Barbados for the Carolina colony. Ships sailing from England to the colony stopped at Barbados before proceeding to Carolina.

*T*he other Thomas Drayton, whom Campbell calls Thomas of Barbados, was a shingler and perhaps a distant cousin of Thomas Drayton Jr. Thomas of Carolina sailed to the Carolina on the *Mary*, captained by Nicholas Lockwood. The ship's manifest listed Thomas Drayton Jr. and 12 other people.

*A*s the story goes, in the mid-1600s, Thomas Drayton and his son Thomas Drayton Jr. left England for Barbados. But soon after they arrived, the soaring population and scarcity of land convinced the younger Drayton to seek his fortune elsewhere. He chose Carolina over the other established English colonies in the Americas and the Caribbean. Following his marriage to Ann Fox, they established the Magnolia plantation on some property Ann's father – fellow Barbadian Stephen Fox – had acquired to miles upriver from the Charles Towne settlement.

*D*uring the mid-1800s, John Grimke Drayton began creating a series of romantic gardens on the property – in part because he believed the outdoor work would help him recover from tuberculosis, and also in order to make his wife, Julia Ewing, feel more at home after her move from Philadelphia. John introduced the first azaleas to America, and was also among the first to cultivate the *Camellia Japonica* outdoors. John not only eventually recovered from tuberculosis, but also planted some of the first seeds that gained the Magnolia plantation's horticultural fame.

*T*o pay homage to Barbados, Magnolia created The Barbados Tropical Garden, which features plants native to the island – as a tribute to Thomas and Ann Fox Drayton.

Drayton Hall

*J*ohn Drayton, (1715-1779), the great-grandson of Thomas Drayton Jr., Magnolia's founder, established Drayton Hall in 1738 at the age of 23. He was born at the neighboring Magnolia Plantation, but after he failed to inherit his birthplace, Drayton purchased acreage near Magnolia and built Drayton Hall. When his nephew William Drayton, the owner of Magnolia, moved to Florida, John Drayton was able to acquire Magnolia. He owned and maintained both properties until his death in 1779 while fleeing British occupation.

*D*uring the American Revolution, Drayton Hall served as a British army headquarters for Sir Henry Clinton and, later, General Charles Cornwallis. As the tide began to turn during the war, General "mad" Anthony Wayne used Drayton Hall as his headquarters until the British evacuated Charleston.

*F*ollowing the American Revolution, Charles Drayton purchased the property from his stepmother, Rebecca Perry Drayton – John's fourth wife. Despite the decline of the plantation economy, rice cultivation remained the primary source of income for the Drayton family until the American Civil War.

*D*rayton Hall's main house is the only remaining colonial structure on the Ashley River to have survived the Civil War. There are varying accounts regarding why Drayton Hall was spared from destruction by the Union Army; however, the most substantiated – and perhaps most interesting – story relates that Dr. John Drayton posted yellow flags at the property's entrance, indicating that it was being used as a hospital for cholera treatment.