

Sunken Plantations

THE SANTEE COOPER PROJECT

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SPRINGFIELD PLANTATION

Isaac Couturier and Thomas Palmer acquired a grant for property in St. John's Parish. Shortly before the Revolution, Captain John Palmer purchased this property, which he named Springfield. He never lived at Springfield, preferring to reside at Richmond Plantation, his St. Stephen's property. Captain Palmer did cultivate Springfield, planting indigo and, later, cotton.

During the Revolution, Captain Palmer served as an aide to General Francis Marion. He survived the war and in 1794 was one of the founders of Pineville. He was active in St. Stephen's Parish and is credited with writing the historical sketch of the parish for Ramsey's *History of South Carolina*, published in 1809.

Captain Palmer died in 1817 and Springfield passed to his son Joseph. In 1801, Joseph had married Elizabeth Catherine Porcher, the daughter of Peter Porcher of Peru Plantation. After Joseph acquired the St. John's property, he decided to live at Springfield and hired George Champlin to build his home. Using slave craftsmen from other plantations, the Springfield house was completed in 1818.

Joseph was highly regarded in St. John's Parish. Professor Frederick Porcher writes of Joseph in 1868, "Few persons have ever had so many trusts confided to them as executors; and none has ever discharged them more assiduously or more faithfully." A spirited family man, Joseph and Elizabeth had fourteen children.

In an article titled "Upper Beat of St. John's Parish," Professor Porcher writes, "The splendid mansion on the Springfield Tract was the abode of the most liberal and unostentatious hospitality. At a time when the roads were thronged with travelers, his house, which was conspicuous from the road, attracted strangers as well as friends, and all were considered equally entitled to its sacred rites." Porcher writes of the property, "The land thereabouts [Springfield] is some of the finest in South Carolina, and very congenial to the growth of long staple cotton."

Joseph died in 1841 and bequeathed Springfield Plantation to his eleventh child, also named Joseph, born in 1818. He did leave the use of Springfield to his wife as long as she lived or remained his widow. Elizabeth died just two months later.

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Joseph, the son, graduated from South Carolina College and the Medical University of South Carolina and was a practicing physician in St. John's Parish. Dr. Palmer lived at the Rocks with his sister Henrietta and used the Springfield mansion as his medical office.

As war came to South Carolina in 1861, Dr. Palmer was too old to serve and he remained in St. John's to practice medicine. In 1864, he married Margaret Allen of Richmond, Virginia, and the couple made Springfield their home. Through the war, Dr. Palmer donated all the cotton harvested on his plantation to the Confederacy.

General Hartwell's Union troops, when sweeping through St. John's, raided Springfield Plantation. They took the property and provisions they desired. The flour, cornmeal and molasses were simply poured out into the dirt of the property. A trusted house slave, Maum Hagar, saved the family table silver. She placed the silver in a bag, tied it to her waist and hid it under her large skirt.

In 1897, Edmund Palmer, Dr. Palmer's son, passed up his last year of school at Porter Academy in Charleston to remain at Springfield and take charge of the plantation for his elderly father. He restored the neglected fields and the dilapidated outbuildings on the property. In addition to planting the fields, he also brought Jersey and Angus cattle, sheep and hogs to Springfield.

After the death of his father in 1905, Edmund purchased the interests of his siblings to become the sole owner of Springfield. The plantation never passed out of the Palmer family. When Santee Cooper acquired the property, Springfield was home to Edmund's widow and Mr. and Mrs. Thomas S. McGuinness, her daughter and son-in-law.

Leize Palmer Gaillard, Edmund's sister, writes, "How long will Springfield remain in its setting of oaks, sycamores, cedars, walnuts, holly and crepe myrtles—each with their long streamers of gray Spanish moss? Who can tell! Progress, the insatiable monster, demands that all that area of St. John's Berkeley, with its beautiful homes and historic associations, be submerged by the muddy waters of the Santee."

The Springfield house and plantation property, situated on low ground, was all destroyed to make way for the lake flooding.



The Springfield house was two stories tall with a full ground-level basement. Waterman reported that the mansion "has none of the grace or refinement of The Rocks or Lawson Pond, though its trim exceeds in elaboration any other."



The Springfield mansion was constructed of black cypress. The house had six rooms on the first floor and a broad piazza stretched across the front.

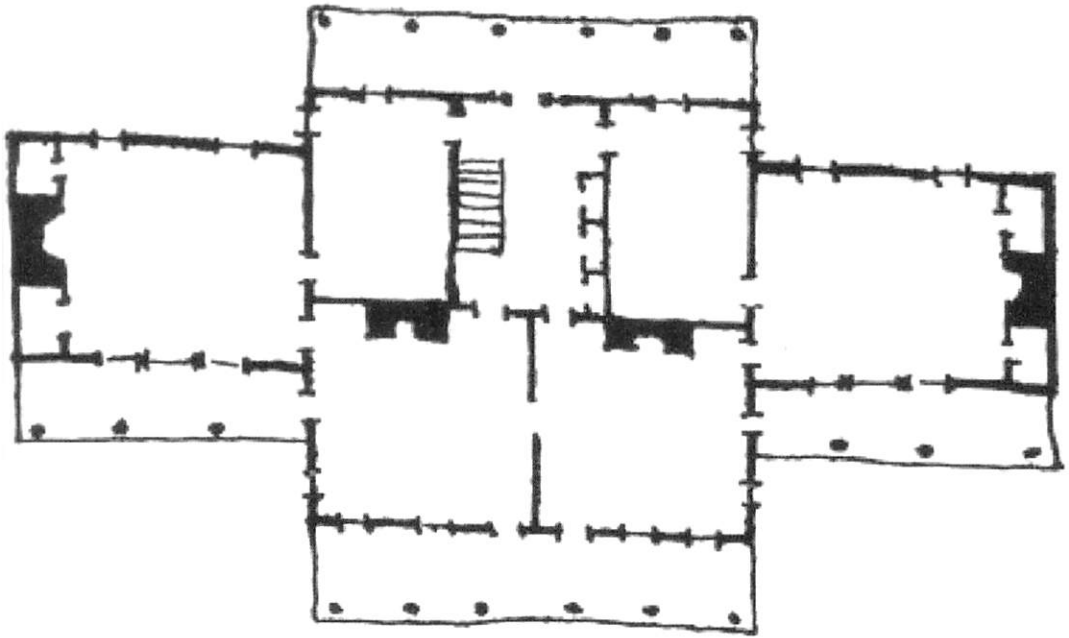
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The Springfield house featured elaborate hand-carved trim throughout. One Palmer relative described the superb craftsmanship as "giving one the impression of something made of lace rather than of wood."



Both of the front rooms on the first floor of the Springfield house featured large and impressive mantels from the floor to the ceiling.



Above: The Springfield floor plan featured the familiar double front doors. The second-floor design called for a wide central hall, four large rooms and fourteen closets.

Right: When acquired by Santee Cooper, this large Dutch oven was found just behind the house at Springfield Plantation.

