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CONTENTS:

ARTICLES

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTES

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"STILL MINDFUL OF THE ENGLISH WAY": 250 YEARS OF MIDDLETON PLACE ON THE ASHLEY

ELISE PINCKNEY*

If we think back to the scene of primordial forest, cut by the frequent marshes and waterways, we can begin to understand the staggering difficulties facing the pioneer white settlers in Carolina. An ambition for horticulture was always theirs. The Lords Proprietors' instructions for the three ships of brave settlers in 1670 included directions: when they stopped for provisions in the West Indies they were to collect certain seeds and roots "planted in a tubb of earth, that they may not dye before your arrivall."[1]

As a small settlement established itself on the bluff identified now as Charles Towne Landing, the Proprietors had their agent lay out nearby a forty-four-acre plantation along the "Great Marsh of Ashley River." Surveyor John Culpepper by March 1673 in his "Plott of the Lords Proprietors plantation" had delineated a small formal garden overlooking the river.[2] It was like a segment of a seventeenth-century English garden — almost. What an anomalous formality on the landscape. It was patterned carefully as semi-circles and bisecting borders geometrically reduced the square of the exterior to a small one in the center.

The earliest description of gardening by the settlers dates from just after the move of the Charles Town settlement from Old Town to Oyster Point. The clerk of His Majesty's ship *Richmond*, which brought Huguenots to the new port in April 1680, stayed a year or so in Carolina. Just after he returned to London in 1682 he wrote a pamphlet about the new country. To answer the curiosity of Englishmen, Thomas Ashe made particular note of the trees and their uses. He continued:

> Gardens as yet, they [the settlers] have not much improved or minded, their Designs having otherwise more profitably

*Editor of this *Magazine*, 1975-1986.

This paper was presented as the first in a series of programs observing the 250th anniversary of the gardens at Middleton Place. The author acknowledges the kindness and guidance of Barbara Doyle, Historian, Middleton Place Foundation, particularly with the materials in the Foundation's Archives.

[1]"Coppy of Instruccons for Mr. West about our Plantacon," in Langdon Cheves, ed., Shaftesbury Papers, *South Carolina Historical Society Collections* V (Charleston: South Carolina Historical Society, 1897), p. 125.

[2]Henry A.M. Smith, "Old Charles Town and its Vicinity ...," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* (hereafter *SCHM*) XVI (1915), pp. 50-52, repr. in Smith, *Cities and Towns of Early South Carolina* (Spartanburg, S.C.: The Reprint Co., 1988).

> engaged them in settling and cultivating their Plantations with good Provisions and numerous Stocks of Cattle.... But Now their Gardens begin to be supplied with such European Plants and Herbs as are necessary for the Kitchen.... Their Gardens also begin to be beautified and adorned with such Herbs and Flowers which to the Smell or Eye are pleasing and agreeable, *viz.*: the Rose, Tulip, Carnation and Lilly, Etc.[3]

In the next decade specific references to one "gardiner" can be found — a Huguenot, Mathurin Guerin, who must have prospered in his profession, as he continued to identify himself thus for many years.[4]

ON THE ASHLEY RIVER, SITE OF MIDDLETON PLACE is incomparable in the Lowcountry. Some other plantations may have a higher elevation, some have a further view over adjoining wetlands and watercourses, but no other location combines the attributes of such elevation and a direct, unobstructed vista downstream for any mile of our circuitous rivers. The irrepressible historian Samuel G. Stoney felt that "The Ashley River two centuries ago was the Thames, the Loire of South Carolina. All the great men of that time then aspired to build Palladian villas along its course and surround them with gardens in the manner of LeNotre."[5]

Good straight bluffs, without intervening marshes, were preempted by the Lords Proprietors for townsites: for instance, the seventeenth-century examples of Charles Town, Willtown on the Edisto, and Dorchester on the upper Ashley, with its fort claiming the preeminent rise overlooking a bend in the river. In the new century, French Jamestown was delineated on a fine bluff up the Santee, and Childsbury was similarly situated on the western branch of the Cooper.[6]

[3]"Carolina, or A Description of the Present State of that Colony, by Thomas Ashe, 1682," in Alexander S. Salley, *Narratives of Early Carolina* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1911), p. 145.

[4]Daniel Ravenel, ed., *Liste des Francois et Suisses ... who Desired Naturalization* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1888), pp. 48, 71; Nicholas Trott, *Earliest Printed Laws of S. C., 1692-1734,* John D. Cushing, ed. (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1978), no. 154, p. 62 (orig.), p. 130; Indented Triparte, May 18, 1708, Records of the Register of the Province (mfm., S.C. Historical Society, Charleston, S.C.); Anita V. Eakin, "Mathurin Guerin's Children," *Transactions of the Huguenot Society* 89 (1984), pp. 44-48.

[5]Samuel Gaillard Stoney, "Art Gallery Today Opens Exhibit Marking 200th Anniversary of Beauty Spot," Charleston *News and Courier*, March 24, 1941.

[6]Smith, "Charleston: The Original Plan and the Earliest Settlers," *SCHM* IX (1908), pp. 40-41; " Willtown or New London" *SCHM* X (1909), pp. 101-102; "The Town of Dorchester," *SCHM* VI (1905), pp. 1-3; "French James Town" *SCHM* VIII (1908), pp. 94, 100; "Childsbury," *SCHM* XV (1914), pp. 189-190, all repr. in Smith, *Cities and Towns of Early South Carolina.*

As for private plantations laid out on riverfront elevations: consider Richmond on the east branch of the Cooper, Mulberry on the west, and Medway, set further from its natural watercourse on the Back River branch of the Cooper River. But as Stoney wrote: "In the levels of the Carolina Lowcountry, prospects of the broad rivers and their wide flanking marshes give the only opportunities for extended views. There too, any altitude is so precious that it is estimated almost in inches."[7]

Certainly, we are all familiar with the practice of celebrating any altitude in the place names: for instance, the repeated use of The Bluff, Ashley Hill, Mount Boone, Corn Hill, Tranquil Hill, Windsor Hill, Halidon Hill, Hickory Hill, Clay Hill — and even in this century: Charleston Heights.

Like many of the inviting sites along a main artery of commerce such as the Ashley River, the grants for the land of Middleton Place date back to the 1670s. Then in 1704 John Williams bought a part of the estate. If propinquity makes for a good and prosperous marriage, he had the right formula, for he married one of the Cattell girls from just downstream. In 1711 Mr. Cattell deeded to his son-in-law the northern portion of his Ashley River tract — those acres on which the gardens of Middleton Place spread. After this wife died, John Williams in 1720 married Mary Baker, who can be identified as the granddaughter and niece of the Bohun and Baker families of naturalists who had settled handsomely at Archdale Hall across the river.[8]

John Williams seems to have established himself well. He eventually owned a total of more than 2,200 acres in St. Andrew's and St. George's Parishes. From 1717 until 1721 he served in the Commons House of Assembly, and was subsequently commissioner for regulating patrols in St. George's, Dorchester. He located his home at what was to become Middleton Place, but he had died shortly before his daughter Mary in 1741 married Henry Middleton, who was to bring new splendor to the site.[9]

The rumor keeps cropping up that the main dwelling was built early in the eighteenth century — in which case it would have been a fine new residence for John Williams soon after he acquired the property. I say rumor for two reasons: it appears only in journalistic writings that provide no documentary evidence; and secondly: the historical writings of Henry Augustus Middleton Smith constitute the most reliable source of local

[7]Stoney, "Art Gallery Opens Exhibit."

[8]Henry A. M. Smith, "The Ashley River: Its Seats and Settlements," *SCHM* XX (1919), pp. 23-27, repr. in Smith, *Rivers and Regions of Early South Carolina* (Spartanburg, S.C.: The Reprint Co., 1988); *Middleton Place*, Photographs by N. Jane Iseley (Charleston: Middleton Place Foundation, 1976), pp. 5, 12.

[9]Walter B. Edgar and N. Louise Bailey, eds., *Biographical Dictionary of the South Carolina House of Representatives*, Vol. II (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1977), p. 716.

information. And he guardedly states that Henry Middleton, after making this property his residence in 1741, "added to (if he did not rebuild) the mansion."[10]

The early date seems plausible for the three-storey brick house. It claimed and delineated the axis — for views and breezes — continuing straight down the channel of the river. "The rooms in the house are small," a titled European visiting after the Revolution condescended to say. And "Absolutely without ornament," one Middleton described it, "except for the semi-circular portico and steps which faced the bend in the River." In general, the house had many characteristics of the Bull family seat at Ashley Hall much nearer to Charleston. Comparing Charles Fraser's sketches of Ashley Hall with the view of the Middleton Place ruins after the burning of 1865, we note particularly the similar pedimented projecting bay on the land side.[11]

An architectural scholar who visited Middleton Place in the 1950s commented, "from the ruins of the central pavilion I can reconstruct the floor plan: a typical central hall, wider than some, with two rooms on either side heated by angle fire places .... typically tidewater Virginia."[12]

The chimneys at Ashley Hall are placed in lowcountry patterns, projecting from the side walls. The elegant house at Archdale Hall, also constructed in the first decade of the eighteenth century, across and down the river from Middleton Place, had a strong front pediment, but the chimneys were within the square lines of the building.[13]

The two Middleton flankers, unattached, but set exactly on the horizontal axis of the main house, are known to date from 1755.[14]

THIS YEAR, 1991, MARKS THE 250th ANNIVERSARY of the spectacular gardens at Middleton Place. To refer first to Henry A. M. Smith:

> The date of the original laying out of the garden cannot be

[10]Richard Yeadon, The Charleston *Courier*, March 7, 1840, p. 2; Smith, "The Ashley River," p. 118.

[11]Duke de la Rochefoucault-Liancourt in Smith, "The Ashley River," p. 119; A. H. Middleton, "Life in Carolina and New England During the Nineteenth Century" (1929), typescript, Middleton Place Archives (hereafter MPA); Alice R. H. Smith, ed., *The Sketchbook of Charles Fraser 1796-1806* (Charleston, S.C.: Carolina Art Association, 1924), pp. 26-27, 32.

[12]Roger Hale Newton to J. J. Pringle Smith, February 28, 1953, p. 4, MPA. See also, Mills Lane, *Architecture of the Old South: South Carolina* (Savannah, Ga.: The Beehive Press, 1984), pp. 30, 31, 249.

[13]Smith, ed., *Sketchbook of Charles Fraser*, pp. 18, 20-21.

[14]Samuel Gaillard Stoney, *Plantations of the Carolina Low Country* (Charleston, S.C.: Carolina Art Association, 1938), pp. 64-65, 174-179.

> stated. Probably some sort of a garden was in existence as early as 1711. But it was between 1741 and 1750 that Henry Middleton, son of Gov. Arthur Middleton and himself later the President of the First Continental Congress, had the gardens, terraces and ornamental waters at Middleton Place laid out by an English landscape gardener.[15]

Actually this particular bluff was probably distinctly asymmetrical in its natural state with the river deflected as it reached this point. The elevation dropped away on the south side as the land sloped down to the sizable creek now absorbed in the rice mill pond; but the northward continuation held to a low formation of high ground along the wetlands. Here was a challenge indeed.

By that time the Ashley River, like many other South Carolina watercourses, afforded many waterfront gardens. Ashley Hall, home of the Bull family, was sufficiently developed horticulturally by 1722 to have its oak avenue planted by Mark Catesby. Drayton Hall, just built, was probably establishing the formal gardens marking the slope from house to river; the family seat since about 1700 at neighboring Magnolia Gardens had a sequence of formal, patterned beds lying north of the original house.

Across the river, the well-known and much-admired seat of two generations of the Walter Izard family, Cedar Grove, presented to the riverfront sufficiently formal gardens to include a "mount" — as in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English designs.[16]

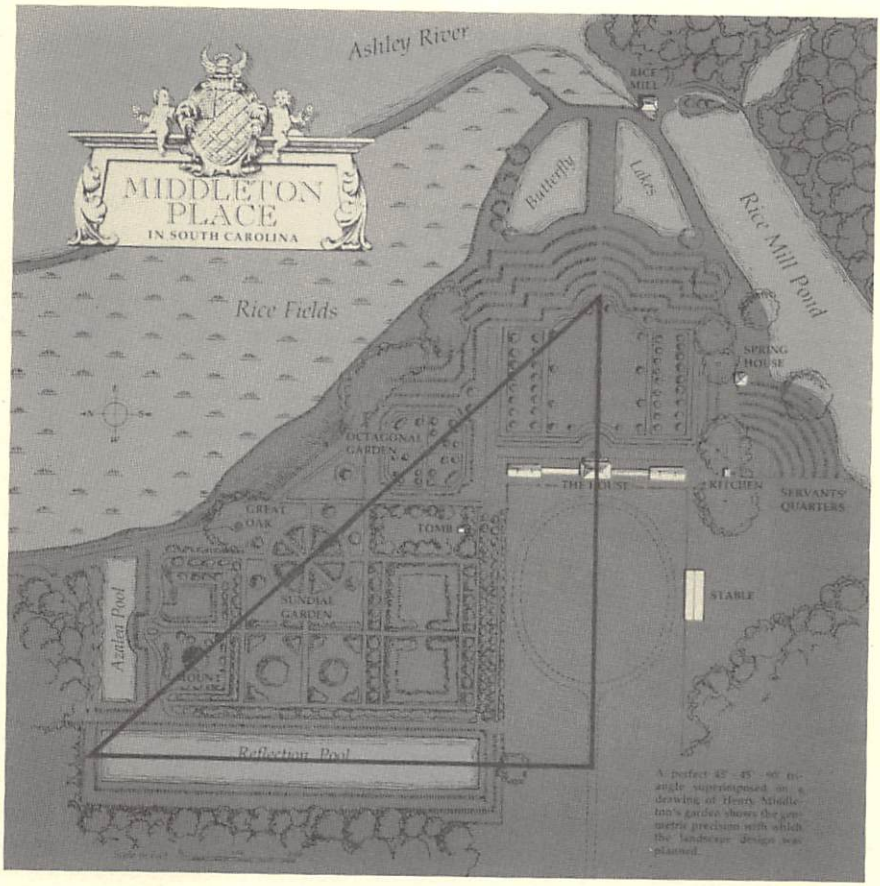
Ornamental terracing was not unique to Middleton Place. Lying to the north of Cedar Grove was the outstanding plantation of Oak Forest, from before the Revolution, the seat of Izard and Wright families. Here, a long bluff fronts the river. Even Henry A.M. Smith generously comments: "The site of the Oak Forest settlement is one of the finest, if not naturally the finest, on the river." Now within the King's Grant development, the area of the former brick mansion and its surrounding landscaping is covered by a series of modern homes. There had been "terraces to the river," but nothing at this beautiful spot remains now to indicate their form across the bold bluff.[17]

One other early plantation known to have ornamental terraces was Newington, near Summerville. This also has now gone into residential

[15]Henry A. M. Smith, "The Garden at Middleton Place," ms., MPA, p. 1. See also, Smith, "The Ashley River," pp. 118-119; Mrs. St. Julien Ravenel, *Charleston, the Place and the People* (New York: Macmillan, 1906), p. 166.

[16]Smith, ed., *Sketchbook of Charles Fraser*, pp. 26-27; Ravenel, *Charleston*, p. 169; Stoney, *Plantations*, p. 61; Smith, "The Ashley River," pp. 94-95, 97-98, 120-121, 40-41.

[17]Smith, "The Ashley River," p. 47.



development. Its former brick mansion was probably built by the wealthy Joseph Blake sometime after 1726. The estate was known for its avenue with a double row of live oaks on each side leading to the pleasant rise — and it also had "terraces sloping to the old rice fields."[18]

Both of these garden terraces now: victims of twentieth-century demographic trends.

Ornamental water pieces were also important elements of lowcountry

[18]Smith, "The Ashley River," p. 165; Richard R. Polhemus, "Excavation at Newington Plantation," University of South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology *Notebook* IV (July-August 1972), p. 85.

gardens. Here in the long growing season of Carolina, a pasture, a parterre, or a terrace would be in dramatic contrast to the surrounding density of the woodlands. Today, ornamental lakes are noted for reflecting the colors of the surrounding flowers. But back when there were no camellias or azaleas in our gardens, the lakes were significant for setting a pattern of light, for amplifying the brightness of the cleansed water surface.

In the use of water pieces, Henry Middleton would have a good example in the expansive, sophisticated garden that his brother William had created in the 1730s at Crowfield, near the family seat on Goose Creek. There, in strict formality, canals and fish ponds accented the lines of the landscaping, as it moved in classic style from the brick mansion to the rice fields.[19]

If it took Henry Middleton, with the direction of an English gardener, ten years with the labor of one hundred workers "during the off-season from the rice crops" to landscape his grounds, it is not unreasonable that some of the trained Crowfield workers from the decade of the thirties would have moved over to transform the Middleton Place bluff in the forties. And they would already know how to lay out a bowling green![20]

The first Henry Middleton was one of the province's richest men. At one time he owned some 50,000 acres of land, including twenty settled plantations. At his Ashley River residence he undertook to create a garden including Renaissance characteristics, but a garden that integrated the landscape, that balanced artifice and natural effect, that adapted formal features to the terrain.[21]

The architect Roger Newton, in visualizing the factors involved in creating the terraces, has written: "With the constant aid of a team of surveyors to map the topography, levels, sites, etc., of his property as it was cleared from the wilderness, and stake out what were to become terraces, pools, walks, axes, canals, etc., these gardens could emerge ... and create what only endures and inspires, *viz.*: Beauty."[22] And Sam Stoney reminds us: "Many of Middleton's plantations made rice, so that his Negroes were trained in banking and ditching."[23]

The unrivalled spectacle of the landscaping is the bold way the lines of land and water fortify each other: the strong axis running through house-

[19]Stoney, *Plantations*, pp. 56-57, 123.

[20]Sarah Lytle, "Middleton Place," *Antiques Magazine*, April 1979, pp. 779-780; Stoney, *Plantations*, pp. 56, 64-65.

[21]Langdon Cheves, "Middleton of South Carolina," *SCHM* I (1900), pp. 239-242; Frances Duncan, "An Old Time Carolina Garden," *Century Magazine*, October 1910; Kimerly Rorscharch, *The Early Georgian Landscape Garden* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Center for British Art, 1983), pp. 2-3.

[22]Newton to Smith, pp. 1, 3.

[23]Stoney, *Plantations*, p. 65.

site, across the broad parterre, down the five terraces, between the butterfly lakes — accumulating energy, as it were, to continue down the straightaway of the river. Emphasis is added by the consistently sloping green walkway down the center of the terraces, smoothly exposed to the light, while shadows play morning and afternoon along the ogee curves of the stepped levels.

Henry Middleton, working with the natural attributes of live oak and Spanish moss, inserted a classically patterned series of gardens north of the house. This was defined by open spaces: the water's edge, the broad clearings of the greensward and parterre, and, where it met the forest, by artificial pools. In the period before gardens could depend on colorful flowers, they relied on line, form, shape, and variegated greens. So we have the octagonal garden, the round sundial garden, and a sequence of differentiated square gardens. Carefully plotted pathways would reveal new vistas — all within the frame of a "pleasance."

There was also a utilitarian plan for the waters. The creek along the south of the bluff forms the Rice Mill Pond, and its flow provided power for the small rice mill. Over the years some 400 acres of Middleton Place lands were productive in the time frames of both inland swamp and tidal fields culture.[24]

Henry Middleton, after his wife died in 1761, resettled at his boyhood home, The Oaks, and Middleton Place devolved to his son Arthur, who soon reached his majority. This young Arthur — who is always identified as the Signer of the Declaration of Independence — courted the young girl just across the river, and in 1764 he married Mary, the daughter of Walter Izard of Cedar Grove. Although English-educated, Arthur was a bold advocate of the colonies' Declaration against the mother country. He died a few years after the Revolution, in 1787, and Middleton Place passed to his son Henry, the infant in the familiar Benjamin West portrait.[25]

The Middletons must have established an immediate association with André Michaux when this royal emissary came to Carolina in search of suitable new specimens for French gardens and arboreta. Michaux in 1782 had undertaken a two-year similar mission to Baghdad, Persia, bringing back to Paris such plants of Asiatic origin as the camellia, mimosa, gingko tree, pomegranate, tea, tallow tree, sweet olive, and Grecian laurel. After a few months in Paris, he came on to Philadelphia, the capital of the Confederation of colonies, and travelled to Charleston in September 1786. Middleton Place received from Michaux four camellias — the first planted in an American garden. They were placed conspicuously in the corners of the

[24]Lytle, "Middleton Place," pp. 779-780, Smith, "Ashley River," pp. 118-119; *Middleton Place* (1976), p. 39.

[25]Lytle, "Middleton Place," pp. 780-782.

borders of the parterre that crowns the terraces. One remnant still marks this eventful planting.[26]

Apparently inspired and energized by his Rousseauean philosophy, André Michaux continued to explore America, gathering its flora. When the first volume of his posthumous *North American Sylva* was published, his son, who had worked over here with him, had four copies sent to Carolina, including one for the Charleston Library Society and one for young Henry Middleton.[27]

ALTHOUGH BORN IN ENGLAND and widely travelled, this Henry soon came to love the land on Ashley River. It was his for more than fifty years. Subsequently, he loved his state, serving many terms in the legislature and as governor. Then he was a member of Congress, and in the 1820s was America's minister to Russia.

More than his father had been, this Henry seems to have been a student of horticulture. His Tree List is one of the earliest documents about the gardens. This Tree List (with shrubs) includes five varieties of oaks, four of pine, poplar, flowering maple, buckeye, catalpa, umbrella magnolia, dogwood, fringe tree, redbud, holly, as well as mountain laurel, euonymus, trumpet honeysuckle, jessamine, sweet shrub (calycanthus), and century plant.[28]

His wife, Mary Helen Hering Middleton, took some interest in gardening matters. She wrote her brother for advice, and he responded, giving directions for the use of a pump — and for mats: "Reeds are abundant, to shade tender young plants." It was during their ownership that this description of Middleton Place appeared in the local newspaper:

> The garden is enriched with a great and beautiful variety of indigenous and exotic trees, plants and flowers, both in the open air and in the hot house. We remarked three varieties of the Camelia Japonica, growing luxuriously and in wasteful bloom in the open air — one of them (a red) being a tree of about 15 feet in height, and of no inconsiderable circumference.[29]

[26]*Middleton Place* (1976), p. 17; Smith, "The Garden at Middleton Place," p. 2-3; Henry Savage, *Lost Heritage* (New York: William Morrow Co., 1970), pp. 182-183, 194.

[27]Savage, *Lost Heritage*, p. 180; Anna Rutledge, typescript notes, MPA.

[28]Henry Middleton's Tree List, typescript, MPA.

[29]Oliver Hering, England, to Mary Hering Middleton, December 17, 1832, Hering-Middleton Papers, 24-63-20, S. C. Historical Society; Richard Yeadon, Charleston *Courier*, March 7, 1840. The large camellia Yeadon refers to could possibly have been the Centifolia, one of the Michaux originals.

THEIR SON WILLIAMS began as a young man to take a hands-on interest in the place he was to inherit. In 1842 his mother wrote to his married sister in Philadelphia: Williams "has been very busy planting out violets ... the whole length of the Elm Walk on the orchard side. Young camellias are innumerable on that walk."

After a decade of ownership, in 1855 Williams confided to his sister the sentiments of most gardeners — with reference to his hard work and his plans "only sketched out: The complete clearing (except of course the fine trees) on the bluff and hill on the other side of the creek is a wonderful improvement ... but, oh Lord, there is much yet to be done."[30]

Updating the report two years later, he wrote: "I have confined my labors almost entirely to planting out young camellias, which I have raised from seeds and when I was last here put out about 220, arranging them in clumps chiefly; and I have scarcely got through more than half the number I have to dispose of."

"The most gorgeous show of camellias you can well conceive," Williams described for his sister in December 1858. "The garden is anything but wintry to look at.... I have multiplied the numbers of them so much within the last three or four years that you can scarcely turn your eyes in any direction near the house without seeing a mass of their flowers."[31] "His energy was untiring," it was written about Williams, "in the extension and care of the garden and to him is due the magnificent lines of the Indian Azalea which when in blossom make such a crown of coloring over the terraces." The landscaping around the Azalea Pool and "across the creek" that is now the Rice Mill Pond represent the Place's adaptation of the then-popular romantic informality — in imitation of nature. These nineteenth-century masters of Middleton Place, Henry and Williams, by choice made their principal residence at their country seats. Like the classical authors they recreationally read in the original — Pliny, Virgil, and Horace — they would aspire to human happiness and goodness in a rural surrounding. In America, as in England, the naturalistic landscape gardens were viewed as a translation of individual political liberty.[32]

Although less involved in the politics of the day than many of his family, Williams Middleton was among the South Carolinians who signed the Ordinance of Secession. His estate and others on the Ashley River

[30]Mary Hering Middleton to Eliza M. Fisher, Philadelphia, January 15, 1842, Hering-Middleton Papers, 24-64-14; Williams Middleton to Eliza Fisher, March 1855, typescript, MPA.

[31]Williams Middleton to Eliza Fisher, December 1857 and December 1858, typescripts, MPA.

[32]Smith, "The Ashley River," p. 120; Rorscharch, *Early Georgian Landscape Garden*, pp. 3-7. See also, Smith, ed., *Sketchbook of Charles Fraser*, esp. figures 8, 20, 23, 27, 32, and 35-37.

almost escaped destruction in the Civil War. It was as late as February 1865 that a raiding party dropped down from the Summerville area and destroyed these non-strategic places. The main house and its flankers were pillaged, the library of 12,000 volumes and the pictures scattered on the lawns, and the buildings consumed by flames.[33]

In this disaster, and even during the depressing days of Reconstruction, Williams showed great resilience: he set about rebuilding the south flanker to be his home, and he soon brought some order back to the gardens.

In January 1869 he could report to his sister in Philadelphia that after ten days of mild temperatures, "the garden and Middleton Place is a sight from the masses, I may say, of camellia flowers in every direction and of every hue, literally wasting their beauty on the desert scene — to say nothing of the large number of sweet olives which I was so industrious in setting out during the existence of the Confederacy."[34]

But this could not last. Reconstruction, with its economic difficulties, was casting its net. The mood had to change. So *Harper's Magazine* reported in 1875, "the place is deserted, and the spirit of melancholy broods over it."

Middleton Place had much to survive in the next few decades; and we can see by the fate of many of the estates along the Ashley how a period of decline prepares a plantation to be the ready victim of developers.

The natural disaster of the earthquake of 1886 probably inflicted the greatest destruction. The Middleton Place-Summerville area lay on the very center of a widespread quake thought to have been strong enough to measure 7.7 on the Richter scale. The still unrepaired walls of the brick mansion and north flanker were brought tumbling. In the underground upheaval, great fissures appeared on the surface, trees and landscape convoluted, and the lakes at the bottom of the terraces were sucked dry. Of the thirty-five country seats which had once embellished the banks of Ashley River with spacious grounds and gardens, very little remained.[35]

The general economic blight, only briefly interrupted by the prosperity of the phosphate industry, made recovery more burdensome for the whole Lowcountry.

ONE OF THE MOST TALENTED AND SENSITIVE ARTISTS ever to do much work at Middleton Place was Miss Alice R. Huger Smith. A descendant of Arthur, the Signer, she has left a charming verbal image of a visit there in 1892. She was sixteen at the time of this excursion from her Charleston home; she wrote her "Reminiscences" in 1950:

[33]Smith, "The Ashley River," p. 120; *Middleton Place* (1976), pp. 9, 19-20.

[34]Williams Middleton to Eliza Fisher, January 24, 1859, typescript, MPA.

[35]*Harper's Magazine*, December 1875, MPA; Robert P. Stockton, *The Great Shock* (Easley, S. C.: Southern Historical Press, 1986), pp. 17, 30.

> All the world goes there now, bowling along a paved road. It is a mere nothing of a trip, but then, it was something. The girls of my generation were not "athletic," we had no golf or tennis. But we could walk. So with my father and cousin [Julian Wells] we did the 15 miles there and 15 miles back, with the good earth and grass under foot; sometimes we toiled through sand that made us really work over every step. However, Middleton Place was beautiful — a jewel thrown down in the green woods. We strolled through its paths under the great oaks looking out across the fields and the River. We had no lack of history there. The settlement of the colony and growth of its laws and government brought one noted figure after another to walk those paths with us, and the Revolution brought another group for us to imagine. There was many another plantation that could match it in history and romance, but I had walked a long, long way to take part with these especial gatherings under these especial oaks, and I did not waste the opportunity....
>
> Here again was the same urge as shown today of dashing around, only our dash was different. I did not dream of having sport-clothes, but my ankle length skirts were raised 12 inches by being tied up with the two masculine handkerchiefs, making a sort of bouffant effect round my waist. Wheels versus feet have made a difference. The likeness is that feet get there too.[36]

Two decades after her long walk, this same Alice Smith, a painter who captured the local environment, recorded Middleton Place, its scenes and individual blossoms, in many watercolors. One in particular shows the little girl then living there, Josephine Smith, standing in a massive oak. Child, peacock, tree trunk, and spreading branches are all dappled with the same colors — contributing another especial gathering.

IN CONTRAST, IT REMAINED for the Massachusetts writer Amy Lowell to articulate more than gloom — an abysmal negativeness — no better for being poetical. She came to Charleston in the spring of 1906, and wrote of: "O loveliness of old decaying, haunted things...." and "There is no dawn here, only sunset."

Her excursion to Middleton Place released her imagination on these verses:

> Step lightly down these terraces, they are records of a dream....

[36]Alice R. H. Smith, "Reminiscences," 21-53-4, pp. 36-38, S. C. Historical Society.

"One [watercolor] in particular shows the little girl then living there, Josephine Smith, standing in a massive oak. Child, peacock, tree trunk, and spreading branches are all dappled with the same colors." Painting by Alice Ravenel Huger Smith, courtesy of Charles H. P. Duell.

And she described magnolias, japonicas and azaleas:

> Flaunting their scattered blooms with the same bravura
> That lords and ladies used in the prison of the Conciergerie.
> You were meant to be so gay, so sophisticated, and you are
> so sad,
> Sad as the tomb crouched amid your tangled growth,
> Sad as the pale plumes of the Spanish moss
> Slowly strangling the live-oak trees.[37]

She was wrong about the moss. But, mistress of a fine garden herself, she did very much wish to return to Charleston.

In 1922, then quite famous and on a lecture and poetry reading circuit, she came again. "I certainly hope to be able to see the Middleton Place again while I am there, I remember it vividly," she wrote Hervey Allen in advance of her March arrival. She found the Place cleared of its jungle of overgrowth and as lovely as ever. A ride in the country was described in an emotional poem: "Do anything to drown the screaming silence of this forest, ... What mystic adventure is this / In which you have engulfed me."

Amy Lowell's failure to relate to the southern landscape was intransigent. But her records of her two visits — 1906 and 1922 — define the change that had transpired: the transformation from the sad, deserted cloister of lost dreams to a lovely garden "cleared of its jungle of overgrowth."[38]

In these years the status of Middleton Place had been changing. After Williams's death just before the earthquake, the estate was owned by his widow; then by his daughter Elizabeth, called Lily, who married Julius Heyward. They did not live here, and the deserted and unprofitable acres were used occasionally for hunting of deer and foxes. By her will, this Elizabeth left Middleton Place to a young cousin, J. J. Pringle Smith, the son of Henry A. M. Smith, whose writings are so relied on in this paper, and his wife Emma, also a descendant of the early Middleton owners. Pringle took possession in 1916, three years after he had brought a Richmond bride, Heningham Ellett, to Charleston. Pringle was a lawyer by profession, and neither he nor Heningham had more than an amateur's experience in gardening. But they immediately began to put their youthful enthusiasm and talents behind the challenge.[39]

[37]Amy Lowell, "Charleston" and "Middleton Place," in *Complete Poetical Works* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1955), p. 450.

[38]"A South Carolina Forest," ibid; Samuel Foster Damon, *Amy Lowell: A Chronicle* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1935), pp. 155, 450-451.

[39]Stoney, *Plantations*, p. 69; Heningham Smith, "My Little World," MPA, quoted in *Middleton Place Notebook* 4 (Summer 1982); Henry F. Pringle, "The 200th Year," *Collier's*, April 12, 1941, pp. 21, 80.

"Alice Smith at Middleton Plantation, 1937." Albumen print by Bartlett Hendricks, courtesy of The Gibbes Museum of Art/Carolina Art Association.

Man's art may dispose and conquer nature, but we in the Lowcountry know how quickly nature will reconquer art. This natural force, combined with the series of disasters for the area — the Civil War, the earthquake, decades of economic stress, isolation — all contributed to the crises for these plantations. Here then was the time of crisis: the decision to transform the estate to the scenes of its former merits. Otherwise its fate would have been determined by the business factors of the next decades, and its terraces, like those at Newington and Oak Forest, would be obliterated by new housing vying for the riverfront. Both prosperity and poverty have their victims.

FOR MIDDLETON PLACE THE NEW LIFE AND ENERGY which came in 1916 charted the course for the subsequent years. Pringle and Hening-

ham Smith envisioned the needed restoration as well as imaginative transformations.

Heningham later recalled:

> I was utterly thrilled, never for a moment anticipating the life ahead of us, but excited over the idea of a home of our own. The garden, before the War Between the States, so perfect and exquisite, now more or less a wilderness overgrown with tangled honeysuckle, southern smilax and bramble; yellow jessamine completely covering the great groups of camellia bushes.... First, the house [flanker] must be made livable.... Sore knees and a tired back meant nothing.... No ice, as no rural electric lines came as far as Middleton Place.... For a refrigerator, we used the oldest refrigerating plant, the spring house. There in the channels where the cool spring water ran, were set the pitchers of milk, and the crocks of butter.... When bath night came, screens were put a short distance from the fireplace, a foot tub and pitchers of hot and cold water placed near and ablutions were performed. Heavens, what I couldn't do with a kettle of hot water in those days.[40]

By 1921 the Smiths were living at Middleton Place except for a few months in the summer. Along with the major projects of clearing and restoration, they made the place productive with the establishment of a nursery. By the next year, Smith was filling orders for young azaleas, then gaining in general popularity. For orders of as many as twenty-five plants, from two to three feet, the price was five dollars a plant.[41]

Help and support came from several family members. "Heningham mentioned that the rose garden was much in need of replenishing," wrote a cousin in Rhode Island, sending some plants from her own garden. Middleton Place began marketing at Charleston locations commercial supplies of its flowers, and of vegetables, especially cabbage and spinich.[42]

Also in 1922, Henry A. M. Smith arranged for sheep from his place on Edisto Island to be relocated for the benefit of the lawns at Middleton Place. The sheep were put on a boat at the island dock and floated to Yonges Island; then came by railroad to Middleton Place. It must have been a noisy day at the landing! Judge Smith kept an eye on the sheep, and noted in his diary two years later, "Went to Middleton Place . . . and hunted for the fox that

[40]Smith, "My Little World."

[41]J. J. Pringle Smith Accounts, 1921-1922, MPA.

[42]Alicia Middleton to Henry A. M. Smith, November 1922, and Smith, Pocket Diary, January 10, 1924, both in MPA.

took the lambs — no success."[43]

The judge continued to take an active interest in his son's projects in restoring vitality to Middleton Place. In the last year of his life, he recorded the additions he made to the aquatic plantlife. In February Judge Smith determined the pond in which to place the lotus. Driving out to the plantation one mid-April day, he stopped by the moats at deserted Fort Bull and found *Utricularia inflata* in blossom. "Took up a number and put them in the 3rd pond at Middleton Place." This location cannot be identified, and none of this bladderwort is now to be found here. A few days later Judge Smith went to a plantation on the Stono River to dig up lotus, iris, and some more *Utricularia*. Later that same spring he "procured pancratium (*Hymenocallis crassifolia*) from banks of [Ashley] river about 200 yards below Bacon's bridge & planted them in 2d and 3rd ponds on edges."[44]

Meanwhile Pringle and Heningham, opening the gardens to the public for some three months every spring, continued with achievements in beautifying the grounds. Magnolia Gardens, just six miles down the road, was already nationally recognized. But it was 1925 before Middleton Place presented extensive advertising to the public. Half-page ads locally spoke of "three of the four camellias from Michaux blooming — and a tunnel of camellias not only form a wall on both sides, but also meet overhead."[45]

Conjecturally, it was in the mid-twenties that the pools at the bottom of the terraces were restored — forty years after the earthquake — and linked with the fresh water supply of the rice mill pond. They do not appear in a 1910 map; one old photograph indicates only scrubby growth in an area of depressed level. Also evidence is given by a 1926 letter to Pringle from the editor of the *News and Courier* recommending illustrations for use in the Artgravure sections and in the advertising: "Would suggest that you make a picture of the pools that you have renovated at the foot of the terraces next to the River."[46]

Middleton Place was establishing itself as an attraction: a beautifully cared-for garden offering many themes of contemplation to the public. It was all part of Charleston's cultural renaissance with heavy local color: the Poetry Society of South Carolina, the cluster of artists, DuBose Heyward and his novels — all relating their views to an annually increasing number of transients.

The National Geographic Magazine initiated wide exposure with an article by the Lowcountryman E. T. H. Shaffer, whose book *Carolina Gardens* would

[43]Smith, typescript of notes, 1922, and Pocket Diary, March 15, 1924, both in MPA.

[44]Smith, Pocket Diary, February 26, April 17, 21, and May 4, 1924.

[45]Clippings, Charleston *News and Courier*, MPA, esp. April 5, 1925.

[46]Frances Duncan, "An Old Time Carolina Garden," esp. map; R. C. Siegling to Pringle Smith, January 1926, MPA.

appear in a few years. He described Middleton Place in his article: its formal manner "stepped back gradually into an untouched forest; the flower beds project in scattered groups among the virgin pines; native flowering trees are employed with discretion in the more formal portions; then more frequently, as they near the forest's edge, so that no one may say just where man's garden ends and God's begins."[47]

For Pringle and Heningham, their project had developed its own momentum, and in the summer of 1928 they treated themselves to a trip to England, particularly to visit Shrubland Hall, the estate of William Middleton, who had left Crowfield for England in the 1740s. There they visited the family and found a classic landscape, embellished in the nineteenth century by Sir Charles Barry. Still owned by Middleton descendants, this Suffolk estate now includes a famous health care clinic.[48]

Meanwhile, back at Middleton Place, annual improvements were taking place. The straight cross path at the end of the parterre, sometimes marked by a wire fence and gate, had been restored as a semicircular termination of the central walk, echoing the lines of the steps of the ruins and of the far definition of the butterfly lakes. The so-called overlook garden by the Azalea Pool had been replanted; and the white marble of the Wood Nymph statue, cleansed from years underground, marked a gleaming focus for the formal terminus of a path.[49]

The public was generating its own response to Charleston's famous gardens. In the spring of 1933 two distinguished British visitors came, Harold Nicolson and his wife Vita Sackville-West, both on lecture circuits in America. Sackville-West was soon to become one of England's great gardeners and writers about gardens. She had just taken possession of the ruined castle of Sissinghurst in Kent a few years before coming to America.[50]

Nicolson arrived in Charleston in February 1933, while Vita gave lectures in Ohio. From his room in the Fort Sumter Hotel he wrote her, "below my window a grove of ilexis. [They both used that term for oaks.] There are gardens everywhere.... Green grass, Azaleas in bud, ... and above all they have walls everywhere, and iron gratings disclosing lovely gar-

[47]E. T. H. Shaffer, "The Ashley River and its Gardens," *The National Geographic Magazine*, May 1926, p. 528.

[48]Henry A. M. Smith, "Goose Creek," *SCHM* XXIX, 1928, pp. 267-268, repr. in *Rivers and Regions of Early South Carolina*; Sarah Lytle, "Family Letter," *Middleton Place Notebook* 11 (Winter 1989).

[49]"Account of Nathaniel R. Middleton., Jr.," in A. H. Middleton, *Life in Carolina and New England During the Nineteenth Century* (Bristol, R.I.: Privately printed, 1929), pp. 152-153; Lytle, "Middleton Place," p. 791.

[50]Robin Lane Fox, ed., *Vita Sackville-West: The Illustrated Garden Book* (New York: Atheneum, 1986), pp. i, 7-17. Now owned by the National Trust, Sissinghurst is the most visited garden in England.

dens." The next day DuBose Heyward called for him: "A very thin, quiet, interesting man. He motored us out to Middleton Place. We drove out through avenues of huge ilexes draped in Spanish moss. It drapes every branch, hanging down like huge cobwebs. In detail it is ugly and untidy; in the mass it is strange and impressive.... Middleton Place was one of the great plantation seats. It is as romantic in its way as Sissinghurst."[51]

It was early April before Vita herself came to Charleston, visiting seventy-two different cities on her circuit. "Charleston is the home of azaleas," she wrote to Virginia Woolf. "They grow wild in all the woods; bushes about twenty feet high in the gardens. They are all out now."[52]

Her poem "Middleton Place, South Carolina" reveals how poignantly this Englishwoman's experience in the garden impressed her.

Stand I indeed in England? Do I dream?
Those broken steps, those grassy terraces,
Those water-meadows and that ample stream,
Those woods that take the curve of distances
Those still reflections mirrored in the faint
And milky waters under milky skies
  That Constable might paint,
Do they indeed but cheat my heart, my eyes,
With their strange likeness to the thing they seem?

Tricked at each turn by nature's difference
Englishmen came, and cut their English shapes
Out of the virgin forest and the dense
Tangle of branches loaded with wild grapes;
Pointing their axis to the river's bend,
Sleepy as Thames. Content as one who finds
  An unexpected friend
In alien lands where blood more closely binds,
Rejoiced they at the forced coincidence.

Look closer; never in an English glade
Flashed scarlet wings, nor grew the northern larch
In onyx pools as here the cypress staid;
Nor flamed the azalea in an English March
Down paths of fallen petals, aisle on aisle;

[51]Nicolson to Sackville-West, February 17, 1933, in Nigel Nicolson, ed., *Harold Nicolson, Diaries and Letters, 1930-1933* (New York: Atheneum, 1966), pp. 138-139.

[52]*The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf*, Louise DeSalva, ed., (New York: Morrow, 1985), p. 368.

Nor climbed the tall liana to the sun,
  Nor squatted near a pile
Of oranges, their morning labour done,
That group of negroes idle in the shade;

Nor from the branches hung the parasite
Of greybeard moss bewitching ancient trees,
Blowing aslant through ilex-woods at night
In painted cobwebs streaming on the breeze;
Singular veils of spectral nameless plot,
The unrelated symbol of a spell
  Once patent, now forgot;
Some lost mythology of woods where dwell
The shorn and lackless spirits shunning light.

Pensive within its evening of decay
The garden slopes towards the river reaches;
Deepens the secret of the southern day
In sombre ilexes and coral peaches.
No England! but a look, an echoing tone
Such as may cross the voice of distant kin,
  Caught briefly, swiftly flown,
Different in resemblance, held within
A heart still mindful of the English way.[53]

For the owners of Middleton Place, the 1930s were not just a time of listening to poetry. They engaged an architect to study eighteenth-century outbuildings in South Carolina and the West Indies, and to design and construct the quadrangle of the stableyard. He picked up the baroque gable which is certainly proper to the place.[54] The south bank of the Rice Mill Pond was underbrushed and embellished with a profusion of azaleas, 35,000 bushes seasonally coloring the hillside and its reflections. To the north, the old riverside rice fields were cleaned and stabilized and flooded with clear, fresh water. In 1937 the so-called guest house, now the restaurant, was constructed. Pringle and Heningham Smith studied exotic plant lists, and ordered, for instance, from a Maryland nurseryman twenty hairy Chinese chestnuts and five hybrids between Asiatic chestnut and Eastern chinquapin. The plant list that was made in a few years for Middleton Place enumerated over one hundred exotic species of shrubs, vines and trees; and

[53]Vita Sackville-West, *Collected Poems* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Doran & Co., 1934).

[54]Lytle, "Middleton Place," p. 790; Stoney, *Plantations*, p. 65.

This view of the house across one of the butterfly lakes shows "the consistently sloping green walkway down the center of the terraces, smoothly exposed to the light, while shadows play morning and afternoon along the ogee curves of the stepped levels." Photo by Terry R. Richardson, courtesy of Middleton Place Foundation.

"Today, ornamental lakes are noted for reflecting the colors of the surrounding flowers. But back when there were no camellias or azaleas in our gardens, the lakes were significant for setting a pattern of light, for amplifying the brightness of the cleansed water surface." Photo by Terry R. Richardson, courtesy of Middleton Place Foundation.

of native species, more than 325.[55]

THROUGH THESE DECADES OF TRANSFORMING the long-neglected grounds, with a pile of rubble instead of a mansion at its center, the determined hand of Heningham has constantly been praised. "Impossible to tell the utter joy of being here once more," she wrote of the annual fall return to the plantation. In 1936 she was given her own gardener, under her sole supervision. They had the responsibility of the vegetable and cutting gardens — meeting a growing demand in the Charleston market.

The season for tourists was still a short one, concluding in mid-May, but in 1940 they recorded 15,000 visitors.[56]

Nineteen forty-one was a banner year. It marked the bicentennial of the establishment of the Middleton family at this plantation and the instigation of the gardens: the finest example in America of centuries-old Georgian landscape design.

National recognition of their success came to Pringle and Heningham Smith when the Garden Club of America awarded its rare and coveted Bulkley Medal — a significant conservation award for outstanding horticultural achievement. The Middleton Place Gardens citation was "in commemoration of 200 years of enduring beauty."

The Smiths went to New York for the annual meeting of the Garden Club of America for the presentation. In his acceptance speech, Pringle paid tribute to all the owners who through their "work and loving care" had kept the gardens — and, especially to "its present mistress."

He continued:

> When I look back, over the years of too much rain, too little rain — rain at the wrong time — freezes in the Spring, and the hundred and one things that you as gardeners know will come to disturb the soul, and harrow one's peace of mind, I recall those lines by Rudyard Kipling:
>
> "Oh, Adam was a gardener, and God who made him sees
> That half a proper gardener's work is done upon his knees,
> So, when your work is finished, you can wash your hands and pray
> For the Glory of the Garden, that it may not pass away!
> And the Glory of the Garden, it shall never pass away!"[57]

[55]*Middleton Place* (1976), p. 26; Pringle Smith Accounts, March 1936, and Laura Bragg Plant List, typescript, 1941, both in MPA.

[56]Henry F. Pringle, "The 200th Year," p. 80; Heningham Smith, "My Little World," and notations, October 1936, MPA.

[57]Charleston *News and Courier*, January 1, 1941; *Middleton Place Notebook* 3 (Spring 1981).

The bicentennial year was also marked by a special exhibition at the Gibbes Art Gallery in Charleston. Favorable weather that spring of 1941 attracted throngs to Charleston's famous gardens. Middleton Place was applauded by a spread in *The New York Times Magazine*. National magazines ran features. Even the movie industry brought Paulette Goddard for scenes in *Reap the Wild Wind*. And the great terraces absorbed it all with comely dignity.[58]

That year's celebration was a milestone in a continuum. Gardens won't wait. Pringle and Heningham annually ordered new supplies of azaleas, spirea, and camellias. They cut the forest back; they created the New Camellia Garden, propagating new varieties. Within a decade the nursery was a flourishing business, including on its plant list sixteen *Camellias Middletonii*, "the finest of the Middleton strain." And, extending the boundaries, they planted the bamboo grove and defined the Cypress Lake.[59]

But the contribution of that generation was drawing to an end. In 1957 a young student at Yale, looking forward to the June recess, wrote his grandparents: "My intense thought is of the happiness of returning home to Middleton Place."[60] In little more than a decade, he was himself the man in charge; and in the next few years he and his young family brought renewed vigor to its custodianship. Preservation, yes; but innovation also in the challenge of Middleton Place as a statement for the public. A whole new chapter on the basics of plantation self-sufficiency was described with the reactivation of the stableyard with hands-on demonstrations.

The Middleton Place Foundation in 1974 established a custodial trust which owns and administers the property as a not-for-profit effort. With the mutation from private plantation to public landmark had come a whole set of sophisticated new questions: what new maintenance solutions, what period to establish for the restorations of the grounds, what would be the role of natural areas? Today, 110 acres constitute a National Historic Landmark.[61]

Fifty years ago the citation of the Bulkley Medal recognized 200 years of enduring beauty. Gardens are not static: no other year had the same silhouette of tree-line, the same seasonal coincidence of bloom. To the potentially one hundred thousand visitors who will come to Middleton Place this anniversary year, 1991, it might seem to be a garden oblivious to change. But even with its cumulative variations, it constitutes one of the most authentic natural museums we shall ever see.

[58]*The New York Times Magazine* , March 23, 1941; Stoney, "Art Gallery Opens Exhibit," Charleston *News and Courier*, April 15, 1942.

[59]Pringle and Heningham Smith, notations, early 1950s, MPA.

[60]Charles H. P. Duell to Pringle and Heningham Smith, April 1957, MPA.

[61]*Middleton Place* (1976), pp. 33-43; Lytle, "Middleton Place," p. 787.

"THE REMARKABLE MISSES ROLLIN": BLACK WOMEN IN RECONSTRUCTION SOUTH CAROLINA

WILLARD B. GATEWOOD, JR.*

In *The American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events for the Year 1867*, there appeared this brief reference: "In August a captain of a steamboat was tried before a post court at Charleston [South Carolina] and condemned to pay a fine of $250 for refusing a first class passage to a colored woman, in violation of Section 8 of General Orders No. 32."[1] The military order issued on May 30, 1867, explicitly prohibited any discrimination "because of color or caste" in public conveyances on all "railroads, highways, streets and navigable waters."[2]

The "colored woman" who filed charges against the boat's captain was Frances Ann Rollin, one of five sisters who reputedly were among the most influential lobbyists and power brokers in South Carolina during Reconstruction. Frances would marry William J. Whipper, an attorney and influential legislator from Beaufort County, in 1868. The other four — Katherine, Charlotte, Marie Louise, and the much younger Florence, all unmarried — lived in Columbia, where they presided over a salon known as the "Republican headquarters" of the state.[3]

By 1871 the reputation of the "Misses Rollin" was sufficiently well known to arouse the interest of journalists who covered Reconstruction in South Carolina for northern newspapers. In the spring of that year, two New York newspapers, *The Sun* and the New York *Herald*, published lengthy interviews with the famous sisters living in Columbia. The two interviews contained virtually identical information and concluded that the sisters did, in fact, figure prominently in the political and social life of the state. Both newspapers were at the time unsympathetic to the "new order" in South Carolina and depicted the Radical Republican regime there as a

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[1]*The American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events for the Year 1867* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1870), p. 697.

[2]Ibid., p. 694.

[3]On Frances Ann Rollin and her sisters, see an article by her great-granddaughter, Carole Bovoso, "Discovering my Foremothers," *MS* IV(September 1977), pp. 56-59; Gerri Major, *Black Society* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1976), p. 178; for two diametrically opposed interpretations of the Rollin sisters, see Claude G. Bowers, *The Tragic Era: The Revolution after Lincoln* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1929), pp. 351-353, and Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Black Power U.S.A.: The Human Side of Reconstruction* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 317-323.