

Plantation Architecture in Colonial Charleston

Assignment:

With your fellow group members, you will be creating a lesson to be taught to the other half of the class. Your group will design a 5-10 minute lesson about plantation architecture while the other group will teach you about colonial Charleston's urban architecture.

Directions:

1. Make sure everyone in your group knows what their role is.
 - a. Roles:
 - i. Curriculum Specialist – This role is responsible for making sure the lesson that is being taught includes all of the required information. You are the primary designers of the lesson. Be sure to consult with the Quiz Masters to include the same information in the lesson that is being asked on the Quiz.
 - ii. Teacher – This role is responsible for being the main spokesperson for the group when it comes time to teach the lesson. It is up to you to teach the lesson clearly with energy. In addition to teaching the lesson, you must also work with your other group members as the lesson is being designed so that you are familiar with the information. Go over the quiz before you teach the lesson to make sure all of the information is being covered.
 - iii. Quiz Master – This role is responsible for designing the quiz that will be given to the other half of the class at the end of the lesson. It is very important that you work with the Curriculum Specialists and Teachers in your group as the lesson is being created so the quiz includes information that is being taught in the lesson.
2. Either on your own or as a group read the following narrative: “Plantation Architecture in Colonial Charleston.” This narrative will provide your group with all

the information and pictures you will need to create an educational lesson. After each member of the group has finished reading, continue on to step #3.

“Plantation Architecture in Colonial Charleston”

By the 1730s and 1740s, Charleston’s economy was supported by the success of crops such as rice and indigo. During her teenage years, Eliza Lucas (who later married Charles Pinckney) played an influential role in cultivating indigo on her father’s Stono River plantation. Her work helped establish indigo as one of Charleston’s most successful cash crops.¹ After the American Revolution, Sea Island cotton would also become a thriving crop grown in the lowcountry. [For the purposes of this lesson, the term “lowcountry” refers to the coastal plains of South Carolina surrounding Charleston] Because rice must be grown in water, setting up plantations along waterways ensured that local planters would build plantations up and down rivers and creeks throughout the lowcountry. However, without the labor force of enslaved Africans, these plantations would not have been able to function on such a large scale.²

The crops being grown on the plantations had a direct connection to the merchants living in Charleston’s urban center. While planters were concerned with the growing of the crops, merchants made their money selling and transporting the crops to from Charleston’s harbor to other areas of the world, specifically England.³ While wealthy planters owned property in town, their plantations were also designed to be family homes and centers for agricultural business. Epidemic disease and sickness plagued many living in the more crowded and dirty city during the hot summer months, therefore the plantation homes were often used as retreats.

Even though lowcountry plantations were located outside Charleston’s urban center, the styles of architecture in which they were built were not all that different from the buildings being constructed in town. From the arrangement of interior rooms to the

¹ Samuel Gaillard Stoney, edited by Samuel Lapham and Albert Simons, *Plantations of the Carolina Low Country* (Charleston, SC: Carolina Art Association, 1939), 28.

² George C. Rogers, Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1969), 9.

³ Rogers, *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys*, 11.

placement of windows and doors on the exterior, many plantations followed similar designs.⁴

Many design features were being mimicked from styles being used in England. It is important to know that because Charleston was an English colony, the people living in the lowcountry looked to England for the latest in fashion for clothes, carriages, furniture, architectural styles, and even social practices. Some of the influences that made lowcountry styles so unique during the colonial period came from the West Indies as plantation owners from Antigua and Barbados moved to the Carolinas bringing their traditions with them.

The use of porches, or piazzas (pee-ah-zahs), along the front and sides of buildings is an example of architectural influence from the West Indies. These piazzas allow residents to enjoy shade and cool breezes during the hot summer months. (See Figure 2-18) Early colonial buildings did not always offer this feature because large porches were not often seen in English architecture. The climate of the lowcountry is much warmer than the climate in England. Therefore, colonists learned to adapt the way they dressed and built their houses in order to make living in such a hot, humid climate more bearable.

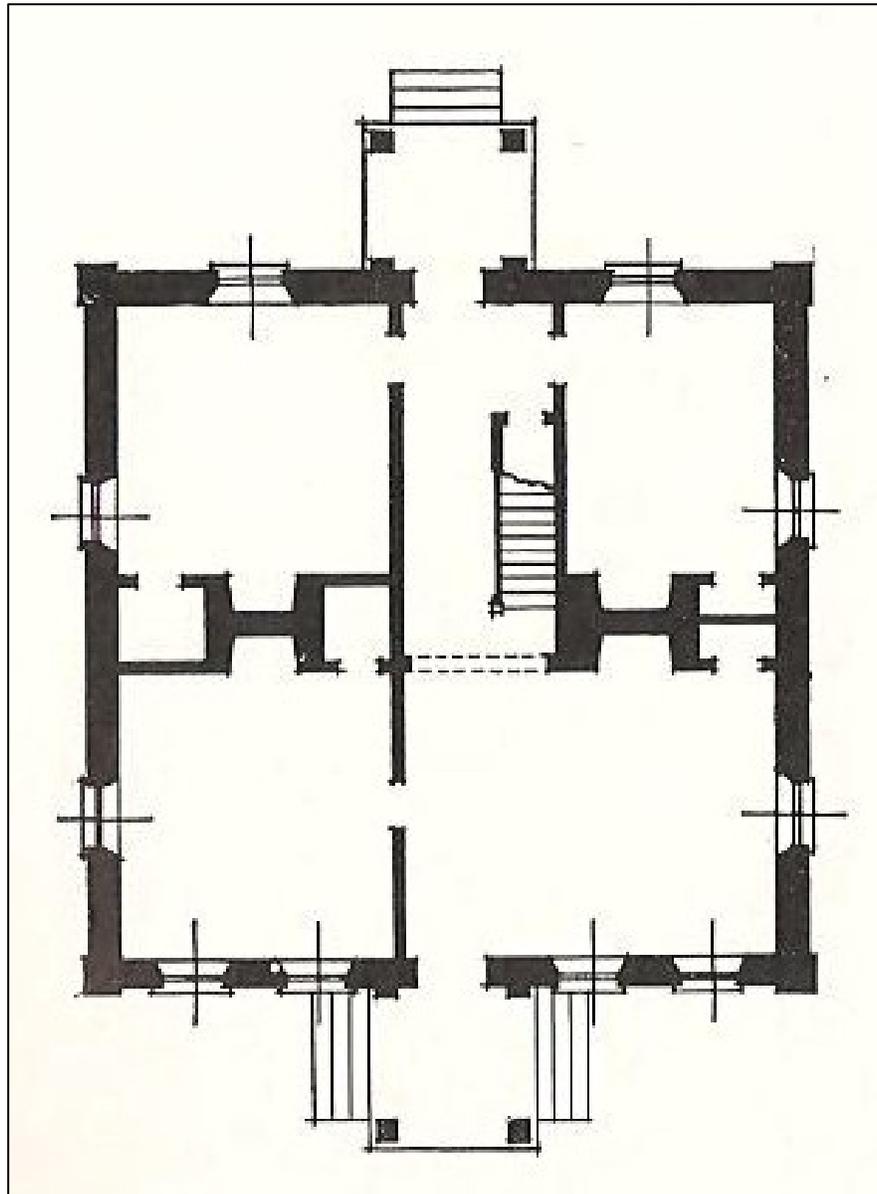
Fig. 2.18 Notice the three-story piazza on the right side of 66 Church Street. Photograph by author. 3 Mar. 2010.



⁴ Stoney, *Plantations of the Carolina Low Country*, 43.

A floor plan, also known simply as a “plan,” shows how a building’s interior rooms are arranged. Many plantations used a similar plan as seen in Figure 2-19. Notice how the front two rooms are slightly unequal in size, yet the plan includes a central hall with rooms on either side. This plan is similar to many of the finer houses being built in Charleston during the mid-1700s.

Fig. 1.19 Plan of Brick House Plantation on Edisto Island. From *Plantations of the Carolina Low Country* by Samuel Gaillard Stoney [Charleston, SC: Carolina Art Association, 1938], 53. Illustration courtesy Gibbes Museum of Art.



The earliest plantation houses would most likely been constructed of wood and fairly simple in design, although brick was being made throughout the Low Country.⁵ It was much cheaper to make brick on or near the construction site rather than purchase the brick from another location. Middleburg Plantation, built by Benjamin Simons in 1699, is now one of the oldest wooden plantation houses in South Carolina. One of the most fascinating aspects of Middleburg is that main building has remained almost exactly the same for over three hundred years. (See Figures 2-20 and 2-21)

Fig. 2.20 Plan of Middleburg Plantation. From *Plantations of the Carolina Low Country* by Samuel Gaillard Stoney [Charleston, SC: Carolina Art Association, 1938], 47. Illustration courtesy Gibbes Museum of Art.

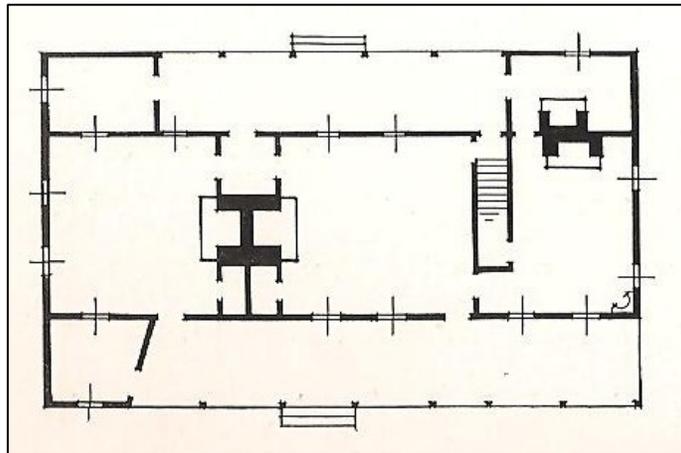


Fig. 2.21 Middleburg Plantation Main House. Photograph by author. 5 Sep. 2009.



⁵ Stoney, *Plantations of the Carolina Low Country*, 23.

Later in the 1700s, as plantations became more solidly established, the simple type of wilderness dwelling gave way to more sophisticated architectural designs that reflected the styles and tastes fashionable in England and abroad. Plantations such as Fenwick Hall, built by Edward Fenwick on John's Island in 1730, show sophistication in planning, building materials, and overall design.⁶ Polygonal rooms, as seen in the plan of Fenwick Hall below, show that lowcountry planters wished to build lavishly designed homes in order to showcase their power and wealth and impress guests when entertaining. (See Figures 2-22 and 2-23)

Fig. 2.22 Plan of Fenwick Hall. From *Plantations of the Carolina Low Country* by Samuel Gaillard Stoney [Charleston, SC: Carolina Art Association, 1938], 56. Illustration courtesy Gibbes Museum of Art.

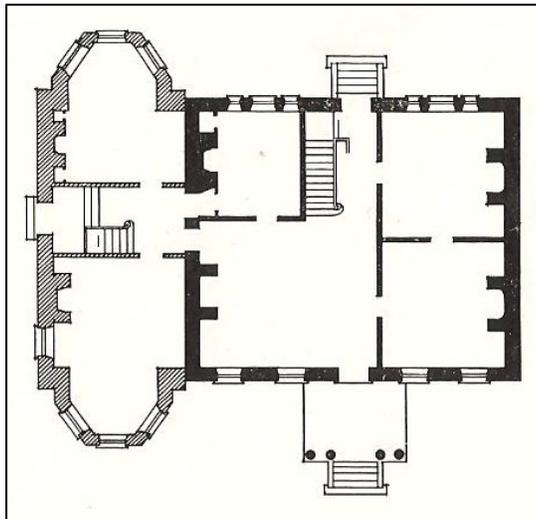
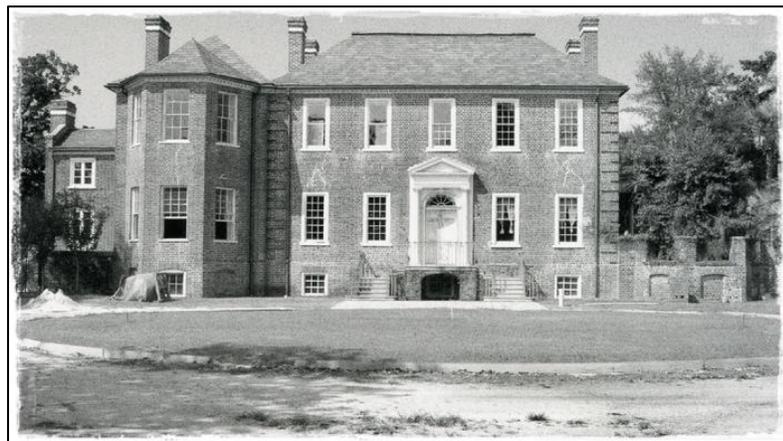


Fig. 2.23 Fenwick Hall Plantation Main House. From Fenwick Hall Plantation, "Fenwick Hall's end?" Photograph. http://www.fenwickhall.com/images/700_Fenwick_under_reno007_framed_thick_white.JPG (accessed February 27, 2010).



⁶ Stoney, *Plantations of the Carolina Low Country*, 24.

Even though not all planters could afford to build plantation homes as grand as Fenwick Hall, the plantations of the mid-1700s have survived due in large part to solid design and construction. This shows that many colonial planters had the wealth to build plantation homes that would survive for future generations, much like the manors and estates of the English aristocracy.

In later years, Colonial plantations of the lowcountry could not maintain the extreme economic success gained during the eighteenth-century. However, this period in Charleston's history is significant for establishing the southern plantation system which plays a major role in the development of the United States as well as in the lives of millions of African slaves and their descendants for centuries to come.

3. Read the following directions that correspond with the role you have been assigned:
 - a. Curriculum Specialist
 - i. Before you begin designing the lesson, make a list of what you think are the most important facts and pieces of information from the narrative. Use this list to help you decide what information should be included in the lesson.
 - ii. Share the list with your other group members. Ask them if they have suggestions for adding or removing any other details.
 - iii. Once the list is complete, give a copy to both the Teacher and Quiz Master groups.
 - iv. Brainstorm ideas for how the lesson should be presented. Consult the members of the Teacher group to see if they have any ideas. Be creative! The following are all examples of teaching methods that can be used:
 1. Perform a skit
 2. Write a story or song
 3. Draw a picture or cartoon strip
 4. Present a lecture
 5. Guide a discussion

- v. Once you have decided how to present the lesson, begin designing it. Be sure to continuously look back to the list you made in the first step of your directions so you include all the important information. The lesson should last between 5 and 10 minutes.

b. Teacher

- i. After the Curriculum Specialist group members create the list of important facts from the “Plantation Architecture in Colonial Charleston” narrative, take the list and become familiar with it. These facts will be the information you will be required to teach to the class.
- ii. Work together with the Curriculum Specialist group as they design the lesson.
- iii. When the lesson has been completed, decide who will be presenting each part. Practice teaching the lesson to your fellow group members multiple times so you will be experts on the information and will be able to answer any questions the rest of the class may have.

c. Quiz Master

- i. Make a copy of the list of important facts from the Curriculum Specialist group for your own use.
- ii. Use the information on that list to create a 10-question quiz about “Plantation Architecture in Colonial Charleston.”
- iii. The questions may be arranged in any of the following forms:
 - 1. Multiple Choice
 - 2. True/False
 - 3. Short Answer
 - 4. Matching
- iv. Once the quiz questions have been written, create an answer key to go along with the quiz.

- v. The quiz must be completed and turned into the teacher by the end of class so copies can be made for your class members to take the quiz tomorrow.