

# Charles Pinckney

National Historic Site  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

## Archeology ... A Window to the Past

Imagine traveling down a wide, sandy road with the steaming sun bearing down on the South Carolina lowcountry. It is late September in 1787 and you meet a fellow traveler on horseback.

You are a slave on the way to Haddrells Ferry (now called Mt. Pleasant) with a wagon load of late summer vegetables destined for the city of Charleston, just across the Cooper River. The traveler is none other than Charles Pinckney, a prominent lawyer, politician and plantation owner returning home from attending the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.

While we don't know if the above scene really happened, we do know that Charles Pinckney (1757-1824) lived at *Snee Farm* in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. He was a prominent South Carolinian who

played an important role in framing our nation's Constitution and was a leader in the years that followed when a loose organization of former British colonies evolved into a powerful democratic nation known as the United States of America.

While many volumes have been written chronicling the development of the Constitution, less is known about many of its authors. Most of the Pinckney family papers were destroyed by the Charleston Fire of 1861.

Charles Pinckney National Historic Site, comprised of 28 acres in Mt. Pleasant, preserves an undeveloped remnant of the land he owned during our nation's formative years.

Pinckney called this estate *Snee Farm*. Unfortunately, no standing structures remain from Pinckney's time there, but



through archeology we are beginning to learn more about southern plantation life from the view point of both the plantation owner and the slave.

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### Foundations tell the Story

Archeological investigations began at *Snee Farm* in 1987 by Brockington and Associates of Charleston, SC. They discovered the remains of an 18th century brick structure, other historic outbuildings and two areas used as slave quarters.

In 1990, the 28 remaining acres of *Snee Farm* became Charles Pinckney National Historic Site,

a unit of the National Park Service. A historic preservation group, **The Friends of Historic Snee Farm**, was the guiding force in this process. The **Friends** group conducted more archeological testing in 1991. This work confirmed that important 18th century remains were present in the east yard of the existing house.

Since March 1991, the Southeast Archeological Center (SEAC), National Park Service, has conducted additional archeological investigations that revealed abundant information about the developments and changes occurring at the plantation during the last three centuries.



SEAC archeologists at work in the east yard in October 1992 uncovering the "kitchen" area.

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## Pinckney's Snee Farm

Pinckney era features and structures discovered thus far include an elaborate, 18th century brick foundation, an earlier entrance road and at least two 18th-19th century slave cabins. Of particular importance in understanding the Pinckney era plantation is the "kitchen," a possible privy and a single brick

pier (discovered in 1992) that may represent the 18th century plantation house.

The Pinckney "kitchen", measuring 12 x 30 feet and the suspected privy provided a large collection of 18th and early 19th century artifacts including Chinese porcelain, fine French

and English tablewares along with more common ceramics and "Colonoware" (slave made pottery), wine and liquor bottles and cutlery. Personalized wine bottle seals from the kitchen and a silver spoon monogrammed with Pinckney's parents initials provide conclusive evidence of the family's use of the site.



Glass wine bottle seals were fairly common in Pinckney's day. The monogrammed silver spoon, with Pinckney's parents initials, matches one found in the east yard by the Hollowell family who lived on the property from 1968 to 1986.

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## Almost 4,000 Years of Occupation

This estate was a favorite of the Pinckney family and from the archeological record it seems that perhaps many other people felt the same way. Evidence of prehistoric Native American occupations are scattered on the property as well as material from

other inhabitants who preceded and followed the Pinckneys.

A slightly later (circa 1825) structure near the kitchen was also uncovered during 1991. It possibly served as an overseer's or house servant's quarters.

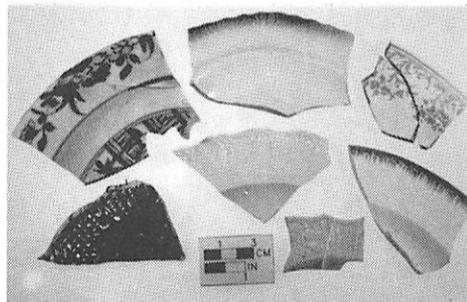
Although some 18th century artifacts were recovered, most from this structure date from the 19th century as evidenced by an 1818 wine bottle seal, an 1833 U.S. penny and Union and Confederate military uniform buttons.

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## A 70,000 Piece Puzzle

National Park Service archeologists have used various documentary sources to determine the ownership, location and likely appearance of the Pinckney plantation house and garden. Computer assisted mapping allows various historic plats of Snee Farm to be overlaid on a modern map of the area, revealing valuable information.

Ground penetrating radar and metal detectors were used to cover much of the core area of the plantation, providing enhanced targeting for archeological excavations. When complete, analysis of the more than 70,000 artifact specimens removed to date will shed significant historical and archeological light on Pinckney's life at *Snee Farm*.



18th Century imported tableware of the style that befitted Pinckney's social class. These came from the "kitchen" in the east yard.

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## The Future

Additional archeological work is needed to conclusively locate Pinckney's homesite and thoroughly understand the role this lowcountry plantation played in shaping the life of one of our nation's important early leaders.

As the work continues, newly discovered information will be incorporated into exhibits and programming at the site to keep the public fully informed about Pinckney's history.

*Charles Pinckney National Historic Site is located in Mt. Pleasant, SC but is not yet open to the public. For additional information write the Superintendent, 1214 Middle Street, Sullivans Island, SC 29482 or call (803) 883-3123.*