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# Charming Charleston: Elite Construction of an Idealized History in Twentieth-Century Tourism

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# Charming Charleston: Elite Construction of an Idealized History in Twentieth-Century Tourism

## **Abstract**

An innocuous tourist pamphlet? The hyperbolic claim of a self-important city? Or the relics of slavery-era paternalism and nostalgia in a twentieth century Southern city dominated by an elite class obsessed with heritage. The associations that leap from this pamphlet, published and widely distributed in the 1930s and 1940s advertising Charleston as a tourist destination for those seeking the aesthetic and historic, raise illuminating questions about the nature of tourism in Charleston. The artist could have chosen anybody to hold the door open to the incoming public, but he chose an elderly black gentleman, grasping the gate with a huge grin on his face, having taken his hat off, and with a slightly bowed posture. Inside the gate, the luscious gardens and blooming azaleas beckon, along with the steeples of the city's churches in the distance. The image, in short, seems to invite a very specific audience into Charleston. This brochure markets Charleston tourism as packaged for tourists seeking to go back to olden times; they desired to view gardens, historic houses and landmarks, and in essence experience the Charleston of an antebellum planter, complete with a happily subservient and very visible black population.

## **Comments**

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Charming Charleston  
Elite Construction of an Idealized History in  
Twentieth-Century Tourism

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2006-2007 Penn Humanities Forum on Travel  
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## **Introduction**

### **Charleston: Opening the Gate for Tourists to Stop and Smell the Proverbial Flowers**

An innocuous tourist pamphlet? The hyperbolic claim of a self-important city? Or the relics of slavery-era paternalism and nostalgia in a twentieth century Southern city dominated by an elite class obsessed with heritage. The associations that leap from this pamphlet, published and widely distributed in the 1930s and 1940s advertising Charleston as a tourist destination for those seeking the aesthetic and historic, raise illuminating questions about the nature of tourism in Charleston. The artist could have chosen anybody to hold the door open to the incoming public, but he chose an elderly black gentleman, grasping the gate with a huge grin on his face, having taken his hat off, and with a slightly bowed posture. Inside the gate, the luscious gardens and blooming azaleas beckon, along with the steeples of the city's churches in the distance. The image, in short, seems to invite a very specific audience into Charleston. This brochure markets Charleston tourism as packaged for tourists seeking to go back to olden times; they desired to view gardens, historic houses and landmarks, and in essence experience the Charleston of an antebellum planter, complete with a happily subservient and very visible black population.

In a twenty-first century mindset, this sort of racial stereotyping and idealization of a history wrought with injustice and conflict is baffling. This prevalent idealization of a charming past, clinging to the relics, modes and manners of a time gone by, prevailed in twentieth century Charleston, especially as conveyed to the touring population. Twentieth century tourism in Charleston was marked by an adherence to the old over the new, the persistence of a southern tradition and the portrait of uncontroversial and nostalgic race relations. This work will trace the evolution of these trends—exploring the reasons for their origins, manifestations in Charleston through the 1970s and how Charleston's portrayals of the past aided its touristic development.

Charleston's antiquated and persistent social hierarchy, a relic from its colonization that resembled an aristocracy, allowed the producers of Charleston's commemorated past to be particularly rigid to any types of change. Instead, Charleston's promoters of memory clung to ideas of the city as

historic and romantic, adherent to the ideals of the Old South, including patronizing racial stereotypes and an idealized history. The Charleston that these elites presented to the world, through their influence in the city government, tourist organizations, preservation societies and cultural endeavors such as art and prose was of a charming city—“Historic and Picturesque Charleston,” “America’s Most Historic City.”<sup>1</sup> This image presented thus shaped both what tourists desired to see and actually viewed in Charleston, enjoying their journey into the past with untroubled eyes, tourists saw an “untainted” Charleston mostly blind to the problems confronting what was a twentieth century city. Irregularities appeared in this pattern from time to time, when the tensions of the present day collided with the commemoration of the past, such as in the development of industry, and in the escalation of the Civil Rights Movement. Yet for the most part, the image that tourists and elite Charlestonians preferred was the romantic and nostalgic image of a time gone by, where beauty and tradition were valued over progress and modernity.

This thesis will explore the aforementioned topics thematically, emphasizing tourism trends in Charleston in their relation to overarching trends of the twentieth century: modernization and industrialization, sectional and regional differences and racial friction. The first chapter will delve into the background information necessary to understand the thematic trends in Charleston. First it will explore Charleston’s history, which had a great influence on the tourism industry as it appeared in the twentieth century and on the nature of Charleston’s elite population. It will also delve briefly into tourism theory, exploring the desires of tourists and how organizations go about gratifying these desires. The crux of the chapter will explore, through use of primary sources, the development of various tourism organizations in Charleston, from the city government and the Chamber of Commerce to preservation organizations founded through the course of the century. Finally, because much of understanding Charleston relies on a visual image and plan of the city, this first Chapter will end with a survey of the types of tourist attractions, their locations and the various historic images they project.

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<sup>1</sup> These are titles of various pamphlets, guidebooks or promotional materials produced in and about Charleston. All are from the Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC.

The second chapter establishes Charlestonians' urban mindset, both in their rigidity to change and their responses to the modern demands of industry and tourism. I argue that the Charlestonians' reluctance to accept modern changes stemmed from their deeply engrained elite blood lines and their commitment to preserving this pseudo-aristocracy through a celebration of their collective family histories. The confrontation between Charleston and industrial development in the twentieth century had complicated implications. On the one hand, industry would help Charleston's economic revitalization, greatly needed after times of economic depression, and bring Charleston into the twentieth century; on the other hand, industry would threaten the integrity of their historical endeavors and façade, corrupting the skyline with smoke and de-emphasizing bloodlines over bank accounts with the influx of commercial adventurers. This opposition to industry and the desire to celebrate and conserve the past led to the development of a slew of preservation organizations and efforts, which in turn aided in bringing travelers to Charleston. Ironically, many tourists in fact demanded certain modern comforts and amenities, a repeated dilemma for the promoters of Charleston in blending the past and present in an authentic and aesthetically pleasing way.

The third chapter delves into the experiences of Northern tourists in Charleston, their fascination with certain aspects of Charleston's history and manners, and the Charlestonians' responses to this invasion of Yankees. Northern tourists had distinct expectations when traveling to Charleston, wanting to see certain monuments, images and scenes that brought them back to the Old South. In essence, these twentieth century carpetbaggers sought to play the Charleston gentleman, some to a greater extent than others as Northerners bought homes for seasonal or year round habitation. Northern tourists alternately revered elite Charlestonians and condemned them for slavery and conservatism. For their part, the Charleston gentry greeted the tourists with both a knowledge that the city depended on travelers' economic resources and an underlying contempt for the new Yankee invasion into their ancient and elite social world.

The fourth and final chapter addresses the role of race in the city, both the stereotyping of the city's black residents for nostalgic purposes and the challenging of these stereotypes. Blacks played a role in Charleston that meshed with the image elite Charlestonians both actively and subconsciously projected of a jovial and subservient "Negro." This image dominated prose and art through the cultural endeavors of Charleston's elite during the 1920s and 1930s Charleston Renaissance, gaining prominence through the rest of the country and attracting Northern tourists to see and hear relics of this image for themselves. Yet Charleston was a twentieth century city, affected by the Civil Rights Movement and urban problems such as ghettos and poverty. Sometimes these public radical tensions between Charleston's projected blissful racial image and the reality of Charleston's race situation caused national news, and hurt Charleston's tourist trade. Charleston was not immune to the tensions and clashes over race in the twentieth century, it simply strived to gloss over the more unsavory images of Charleston with an idealized history that would be challenged more and more as the twenty-first century approached.

Of necessity, this history of tourism relies largely on relics of the experience itself, found in popular culture such as pamphlets, scrapbooks, images and newspaper and magazine articles. In addition to these cultural sources, the records and notes of the various tourism organizations from city government to preservation societies, proved integral in relating the experiences and desires of travelers found in the popular culture sources to the conscious construction of the tourism industry in Charleston. The unification of these two types of primary resources allows an examination of both the producers and consumers of travel in Charleston, exploring outside and inside perspectives. All most all of the primary source material existed in Charleston, spread across a number of different libraries and archives. Even many of the national magazine and newspaper articles used were located through these libraries, archives and scrapbooks, further demonstrating the importance in Charleston of tracking its tourism and bolstering its own image. Close analysis of the text and images within such sources reveals not only the story of the development and challenges to Charleston's tourism in the twentieth century; it offers a method for examining the accumulation of ephemera, reactions, sentiments and impressions of Charleston.

One work which has treated some of these themes and questions is Stephanie Yuhl's *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston*, which deals primarily with the activities of those involved in the Charleston Renaissance. She explores the art, performance and writing of the time period from the 1920s until 1940, also delving into how history was conceptualized and commemorated during this time. Dr. Yuhl's work offered a reference point, especially in reference to the Charleston Renaissance; however, her time period was more limited and lacked the exclusive focus on travel. Others have written about various aspects of tourism in Charleston, such as Robert Weyenth in *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, an organizational history of the Historic Charleston Foundation. Additionally, I used the writings of contemporary travel writers such as Tony Horwitz and V.S. Naipaul for present-day comparison and perspectives. Beyond these secondary sources dealing directly with travel, more general books about South Carolina and Charleston history offered context while theories about the nature of tourism provided background to readers unversed in those subjects.

Finally, one invaluable source in writing this work was my own personal experience in Charleston. The idea for this topic emerged out of my own travels to Charleston and the questions over race, modernity and memory that I confronted in visiting twenty-first century Charleston, first as a tourist and then as a historian. I will argue that though changes in Charleston's tourism packaging and attractions have been made, there is still a distinct feeling that when you travel to Charleston, you abandon your modern mentality in order to play the Charleston gentleman or lady. My own experiences in Charleston not only formed my initial ideas about the nature of tourism in Charleston, they also allowed me to describe more in depth the physical layout, attractions and feeling of Charleston as only one well-versed in a city can do. Though my contemporary observations may differ from the experiences of the past, they show the continuity through time of the characteristics and issues in Charleston's tourism.

In a time of political challenges and upheavals, technological advancements such as space exploration and the nuclear bomb, and cultural and social revolutions in the United States, one might

question why the archaic little city of Charleston, South Carolina is even worth studying. Yet Charleston is far from small, and in the words of Charlestonian and author Robert Molloy, Charleston's actions and attractions seem "to prove that the still small voice of distinction can make itself heard in a raucous world."<sup>2</sup> Charleston screams its importance to visitors and observers, not through overly vocal advertising or prose, but through its sights and sounds. Charleston was viewed as a haven of a time gone by in the midst of a country that moved too quickly, without allowing its citizens to stop and smell the proverbial flowers. In Charleston, visitors could kick back and enjoy a vacation of leisure, history and culture. At the very least, studying Charleston, and tourism in Charleston, is important to understand the mentality and desires of visitors from around the country. Charleston presented itself as a chance for people to escape their hectic lives into a simpler place and time, a necessary and profitable commodity in a fast-paced country such as the twentieth century United States.

Yet Charleston was not just an archaic and stubborn Southern city providing a distraction for busy and productive Americans; rather, twentieth century Charleston, clearly through its embrace and consideration of tourism, exhibited clear manifestations of more subtle national trends. The whole country was undergoing change in the twentieth century, from modernizations and technical innovations, to confronting sectional divergences and tackling the issues that arose with the re-thinking of race relations. Charleston, with its adherence to tradition and history, provided a forum where these twentieth century confrontations stood out from the dated ambiance. Even in the city elites' reluctant handling of these issues, their manifestation in Charleston demonstrates the extent of these subjects such that even a city almost of another world clearly exhibited these trends. Charleston's uniqueness as a city steeped in history and tradition alone makes it worth examining; coupled with the way national trends played out on the distinctive Charleston tourism stage, Charleston becomes a fascinating case study of larger trends.

Finally, studying Charleston's tourism is crucial to understand tourism trends, especially the development of tourism in the South after the challenges of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Tourism is

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Molloy, *Charleston, A Gracious Heritage* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1947), v.

a powerful economic, social and cultural sector in the states of the former Confederacy, instigating changes in local culture and the promotion and manipulation of images in Southern cities. Tourism affects an area's native residents, as they try to meld their area's identity to tourist desires. In Charleston, tourism has had significant influence on the city's development; yet the elite Charlestonians were so vocal and powerful in their own right, the clash between the "natives" and the tourists' desires were more pronounced in Charleston than elsewhere.

Even after studying Charleston for the past year, traveling to it for long periods of times and observing its idiosyncrasies, Charleston remains an enigma to me. Much like the "Charleston Welcomes You" brochure, what lies hidden behind the gates, though partially visible on the surface, is never what you expect. The brochure only gives viewers a corner of a house, a steeple of a church, and part of an azalea bush. To experience the real Charleston, you must enter the gates and plunge into its unpredictability and matchlessness. I can simply attempt to explain Charleston's eccentricities and allure in terms of contemporary tourism, knowing that tourists and myself alike were drawn to the city because of its singularity. The twentieth century presented challenges to Charleston and its tourism, but it greeted the challenges with invariable politeness but unpenetrable rigidity. A journey into Charleston, through physically visiting it, seeing pictures of it, or reading about it, is a journey into a place where past trumps present, vivid colors proliferate, scents entice, and the historical ambiance seduces travelers into the mindset of the past as they cross through the gate, entering into the enigmatic city of Charleston.

## Chapter 1

### History and Ambiance: Setting the Stage for Charleston's Tourists

Carriages rolling down palmetto-lined streets with stunning mansions. Expansive gardens in front of stately plantation manors. Noble forts complete with cannons and flags. Charleston, South Carolina practically bleeds historical tourism. These images are vital to the area's tourism, surprising visitors with the one of a kind picture of a colonial and antebellum city. The exceptionality of Charleston's historical tourism relies on the history of the region itself. Without the events and society that developed in its roughly three-hundred-year history, Charleston would not have many of the tourist attractions it offers to entice tourists to its shores. The developments that followed in Charleston's twentieth century tourism, such as the contention with modernity and over representations of race in tourism, derived their provocative nature from its eminent and controversy-filled history. Additionally, tourism in Charleston would not have had a chance to develop without the inspirations and desires of the tourists themselves.

Through the twentieth century, many different organizations, both official and unofficial, worked to promote and correlate Charleston's tourism efforts. Working in collaboration or alone, strictly for economic reasons or to preserve the architectural and historical integrity of the city, the tourism organizations that arose and expanded in the twentieth century dominated the debates over tourism and Charleston's development. The different organizations promoting tourism each had their own agenda however, and promoted different aspects of the city's touristic development, from its accessibility from transportation hubs, to retaining historical authenticity and promoting an idealized past. These organizations each aided the creation of what would become some of Charleston's most prized tourist attractions, which comprise several categories ranging from the concrete—the houses, gardens and forts—to the abstract—the streets and ambiance. Charleston's history, tourism organizations, physical attractions, and atmosphere would set a stage where debates and national trends could play out, both

benefiting Charleston's tourist industry and promoting an romanticized history to the liking of Charleston's elite population.

### **Part I: Charleston History: Rich in Romance and Tradition**

Charleston's tourism industry derives much of its success from the history of the city and the surrounding Low Country region. The city's history, that allowed for the building of magnificent plantations and stately city streets, brought together the ingredients for an idealized history from which Charleston derives its appeal as a tourist destination. Its long history of wealth and elite class structure formed its image and identity well into the twentieth century. The city of Charleston was founded in 1670 and named "Charles Town" to honor King Charles II of England. King Charles II granted the land for South Carolina to eight lord proprietors, and the colony drew early immigrants from the West Indies and New England, making it more of a "colony of a colony," than a completely new colony of its own.<sup>3</sup> With the settlers from the West Indies came "Negroes and other servants;" but slavery was not fully codified until the cultivation of rice became the mainstay of Carolina Low Country agricultural production in the early eighteenth century. The expansion of rice cultivation can be partly attributed to the skills that the Africans brought over to Carolina: many were already well versed in the cultivation of rice. Rice was so successful that the colonists kept importing slaves from the West Indies and Africa, and by 1708, the black population constituted a majority in South Carolina.<sup>4</sup> The booming rice industry brought trade into the Low Country, and before long, Charleston was a thriving port city. Colonial Charleston became the lifeblood of Carolina Low Country, not only as a colonial economic center, but also a thriving cultural center. The city's elites exercised authority and influence beyond the region, attending the Continental Congress, and signing the Declaration of Independence.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Wood, *Black Majority* (New York: Knopf, 1974), 13. See Figure 2 in the Image Appendix for a map of colonial Charleston.

<sup>4</sup> Walter B. Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 69.

<sup>5</sup> Stephanie E. Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 2.

In the midst of Charleston's success as a port city and the region's success with the cultivation of rice and the plantation system, the city's richest and most influential planters began to form themselves into a social hierarchy that approached the type of aristocracy that dominated Britain. This pseudo-aristocracy, a social system that relied on names and kinship without an actual monarchical system like that in Britain, revolved around a group of wealthy families who solidified their social, political and economic power in Charleston through family ties and loyalties.<sup>6</sup> Alfred Huger, a Charlestonian of the twentieth century still proclaiming elite status, not un-self-servingly attributed the origins of the Low Country social order to the natural fitness of mind and body of the Charleston families, the isolation of the region from Northern colonies and England, and the benefits of climate, agricultural success and slavery.<sup>7</sup> The persistence of this social hierarchy, and the sense of entitlement families would feel well into the twentieth century began in Charleston's colonial era. It was this social and local legacy upon which the tourism industry would later capitalize.

Early in its history, Charleston's prosperity was challenged from within and without by both slave rebellions and the American Revolution. In 1739, a group of slaves shook the planters' sense of security by rising up in the Stono Rebellion, killing over sixty people only twenty miles away from Charleston. This rebellion triggered the master class to make new slave codes and increase slave discipline.<sup>8</sup> The American Revolution split the city in two, due to the significant number of both loyalists and patriots among Charleston's elite planter class. Before the Declaration of Independence was even signed, the British fleet attacked Charleston at what would later become Fort Moultrie. The fort held, but the fleet returned four years later in 1780, forcing Charleston to surrender; the city remain under British control for the rest of the war.<sup>9</sup> Slaves in Charleston threatened to rise up again in 1822 under the leadership of Denmark Vesey, a free and literate black man. The conspiracy was exposed by slaves themselves; they

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<sup>6</sup> Lorri Glover, *All Our Relations: Blood Ties and Emotional Bonds among the Early South Carolina Gentry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), xv.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Huger, "The Story of the Low-Country" in *The Carolina Low-Country* produced by the Society for the Preservation of Spirituals (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1931), 113.

<sup>8</sup> Wood, *Black Majority*, 308.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Molloy, *Charleston, A Gracious Heritage* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1947), 77.

received freedom and annual stipends for their service.<sup>10</sup> Vesey and thirty-seven other participants were executed upon the discovery of his conspiracy, but white Charleston was still taken aback by the bloody plot; subsequently, leaders in Charleston passed laws hampering the movement of both free and enslaved blacks.<sup>11</sup>

Antebellum Charleston appears either as Charleston's golden age, or its path to destruction. Wealthy and blue-blooded Low-Country plantation owners kept town houses in Charleston; the economic success and sense of entitlement of these planters created a rigid social atmosphere, but allowed the community to flourish culturally and intellectually. The city's elites participated actively in literary endeavors and politics—forming the core of the conservative secessionists as the Civil War approached. Despite the social and cultural activity, Charleston was torn apart as the city divided over nullification, secession and slavery. There was a distinct ideological divide between Charleston and the surrounding plantations of the Low Country on the one hand, and the rest of the state, called the Back Country, on the other. Common farmers with few slaves inhabited the Back Country, while the Low Country contained wealthy, high society rice planters keeping hundreds of slaves. In 1860, when Charleston was selected as the location for the Democratic National Convention, the city found itself at the crux of national debate. Charleston, home to some of the most vehement secessionists called Fire Eaters, was most likely an imprudent choice to play host to such a heated national debate on the Democratic nomination for president. The convention was a debacle, and Charleston and its residents were partly to blame.<sup>12</sup> Months later, in December of 1860, South Carolina's secession convention met in Charleston. The convention participants required only two days of debate, as most of Charleston's elites had already

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<sup>10</sup> The Vesey Conspiracy was led by exceptional black men at the time. Many were free artisans and had high degrees of literacy, communicating within their group by letters. Vesey and his other leaders drew on knowledge of classical literature, the Bible, traditional African religious beliefs and an advanced idea that blacks were responsible for their own liberation to draw other slaves and free Charleston blacks into the conspiracy. The conspiracy never reached its goal of revolt because it was discovered by the city's white population. Two mulatto slaves, Peter Desverneys and George Wilson, were vital informants. The unraveling of the conspiracy emphasized the widening gap between free blacks and slaves, and mulattos and those with darker skin. Bernard E. Powers Jr., *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1885* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 29-32.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-32.

<sup>12</sup> Robert N. Rosen, *Confederate Charleston* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 32-36.

known and possibly manipulated the outcome from the beginning.<sup>13</sup> On December 20, 1860, Charleston seceded from the Union along with the rest of South Carolina, soon to be followed by ten other states to form the Confederate States of America.<sup>14</sup>

Charleston's role in the Civil War is immortalized by the battle for Fort Sumter, the first shots evoking memories of rebellion and regret. The fort later became a monument serving as a great attraction to Civil War buffs and tourists alike. The early years of the Civil War saw little action for the blockaded Charleston, but in 1863, Charleston was again in the national spotlight when the Union Navy began its siege, bombarding the city for months.<sup>15</sup> Finally, towards the end of the Civil War, eyes turned to the wrath of Sherman's Army as he marched through the South, destroying much that lay in his way. Plantation houses along the Ashley River just outside of Charleston were razed to the ground; however, Sherman avoided Charleston proper, leaving it intact and undamaged by his army of foragers and arsonists. Charlestonians and historians alike speculate on Sherman's reasons for sparing the city. Some contend that it was due to fond memories for the people he met and the places he saw when he was stationed at Fort Moultrie from 1842-1846, and others attribute it to his love for a Charleston lady.<sup>16</sup> Either way, Charleston avoided the utter destruction that many other Southern cities were subjected to by

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<sup>13</sup> There is a fair amount of debate over the justice of the vote in most of the secession conventions. Those in places of power were able to manipulate the system by both falsely counting votes and pressuring others to vote for secession. This phenomenon was not as prevalent in South Carolina as it was in other less conservative states, where there was more of a divide between Unionists and Secessionists, but it existed in South Carolina nonetheless.

<sup>14</sup> Rosen, *Confederate Charleston*, 44.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 135. There were apparently some questions in the administration as to whether Sherman should destroy Charleston or Columbia, South Carolina. Charleston had less military importance, but much more symbolic value as the city that began the war. Because many expected Sherman to destroy Charleston, troops were moved to protect the city, leaving Columbia less defended; in addition, Charlestonians (individuals and organizations such as churches) sent their valuables for safekeeping in Columbia. However, Sherman set his sights on Columbia instead of Charleston, the logical stop on his March to the Sea. Charleston was probably saved because of its geographic location—surrounded by swampy area and out of the way of the march to Richmond; thus it was an illogical stop for Sherman to make. All of Sherman's letters and statements indicate these reasons and the fact that Charleston was already a wreck as his reasons for bypassing the city; however, some speculate that pleasant memories of his four years in the 1840s spent stationed at Fort Moultrie, and his love for a Charleston lady were the true reasons for sparing it. The story of the Charleston lady, though romantic, deserves some speculation, as the same tale is told in Augusta, Georgia, another city Sherman threatened, from Robert N. Rosen, *Confederate Charleston* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 133-137.

Sherman's Army, leaving much of its colonial and antebellum architecture intact for tourists to enjoy generations later.

The conclusion of the Civil War accelerated a decline in Charleston's "golden age" and economic stability that had, to some extent, started even before the Civil War. Besides the destruction of Charleston's economic resources and outlying areas in the wake of the Civil War, in the period of Reconstruction, Charleston suffered several natural disasters—earthquakes and hurricanes—that further destabilized the city's weak economy and bureaucracy. As agricultural production shifted to the interior of the state, into what was formerly disdained as the Back Country, and exports dropped, Charleston's bustling port grew quieter.<sup>17</sup> When United States troops withdrew from South Carolina in 1877, Wade Hampton, born in Charleston, was elected Governor, giving the state a newfound sense of resolve with their self-government. There was some rallying in the economy and politics of the Low Country in this period late in the nineteenth century, but the city was still in debt and Charleston's economy was failing.<sup>18</sup> Many of Charleston's ever-persistent social elite clung to their sense of place and entitlement while their fortunes, estates and city crumbled.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, Charleston failed to live up to the expectations of New South reformers and Charlestonians alike. Even the arrival of the First World War, initiating an expansion of Charleston's navy yard and wartime production, did not appreciably rouse the city's latent economy or civic progression.<sup>19</sup> Yet in the years after the First World War, Charleston experienced what has been come to be known as the "Charleston Renaissance:" a reawakening of the city's culture in the artistic, musical and literary circles.<sup>20</sup> This Renaissance did not represent an embrace of progress; rather, its participants retreated to portraying a familiar and secure version of Charleston's past. This Renaissance centered in elite circles, with its participants and contributors hailing primarily from old

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<sup>17</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Molloy, *Charleston: A Gracious Heritage*, 109-110.

<sup>19</sup> Walter J. Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!: The History of a Southern City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 359-360.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 20.

slave-holding families, many still living in the downtown houses built for their ancestors. And so in the early twentieth century, where this examination of Charleston's tourism development will begin, Charlestonians were poised in a transitional city—with the rest of the country pulling them forward towards modernization and progress, and their own sense of place and elite history pulling them back, reluctant to embrace the advancements of the twentieth century. Charleston retreated back into its Colonial and Antebellum golden age, where beautiful houses and gardens and gardens, antique chests and the memories of the Old South reigned supreme. This was the Charleston twentieth century tourists sought to visit, delighting in the attractions, the novelty and the apparent authenticity of the city; at the same time, Charlestonians were forced to accept and celebrate the economic revitalization the tourists brought to the city, creating a sometimes fractious dialogue between the producers and consumers of tourism.

## **Part II: The Psychology of Tourism and American Tourism Development**

The evolution of Charleston tourism in the twentieth century, though certainly displaying numerous unique and puzzling aspects, was not separate from larger trends in the history and psychology of tourism in America. There, as elsewhere, there are both producers and consumers of tourism, a relationship that developed simultaneously in reaction to one another's actions. Consumers represent the tourists themselves, visiting the attractions, buying the souvenirs and evaluating their experiences. Producers correspond to entities recognizing the needs of consumers and adapting the cultural experiences of the area to these needs—sometimes for their own economic, political or social purposes.<sup>21</sup> Tourist scholar Dean MacCannell defines the experience of tourism emerging in this relationship between producers and consumers of tourism—a stream of cultural occurrences structured around the actual event

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<sup>21</sup> This theory on producers and consumers of tourism is my own posit formed from research in Charleston.

or the aspect of life producers portray to the tourist, and the emotional or intellectual reaction that this model or event inspires in the observer.<sup>22</sup>

MacCannell contends that a tourist attraction develops from the relationship between the tourist, the site, and some sort of marker that distinguishes the site as an attraction or experience. Markers appear in the forms of guidebooks, informational tablets, travelogues and souvenirs.<sup>23</sup> Hence a site cannot be a tourist attraction without something defining it as so—the work of some producer of tourism distinguishing it as a cultural artifact. Sometimes, an entire section of a city can become a tourist artifact, encompassing all the elements of the urban structure to provide an overarching tourist experience—for example, shops, offices, facilities and the sites themselves can all work together formulating a cohesive tourist experience.

For examining Charleston's tourism, two kinds of tourist experiences that MacCannell delves into are particularly relevant: tradition and history experiences. Exploring tradition through tourism involves restoring or re-enacting old traditions as a way of lamenting a distance from the past and breaks with tradition. A historical attraction is where a museum, monument or living reminder conveys a place's history.<sup>24</sup> Historical tourism interpretation is wrought with the preoccupations and agendas of the present—such as in Charleston, where its elites essentially formed the historical image they wanted to project.

MacCannell argues that a crucial aspect of the tourist experience particularly in the areas of history and tradition involves the authenticity of attractions. He describes the “back regions” or behind the scenes things that people like to see to understand the “real story” of attractions. Tourists want to see life as it was really lived by the “natives;” they are seeking a demystified experience. In Charleston, some of these “back regions” would include the kitchens or storerooms of the old mansions.<sup>25</sup> Through these

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<sup>22</sup> Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 23-24.

<sup>23</sup> MacCannell, *The Tourist*, 41-42.

<sup>24</sup> For more information on Tradition and History in Tourist experiences, see MacCannell, *The Tourist* pages 82-88.

<sup>25</sup> For example, at the Drayton Hall Plantations, visitors are taken into the basement to see the storerooms of the plantation and how kitchen life would have worked. Additionally, other plantations, such as Boone Hall Plantation,

“back regions,” tourists are able to glimpse the everyday life of people living in that period, giving them the authentic experience they seek. But often, these experiences are only superficially authentic, as producers of tourism recognize the desire for authenticity, and set up these “back regions” to seem authentic, while still imparting their influence upon them.<sup>26</sup> Thus, MacCannell gives one psychological and sociological interpretation of the forming of a tourist experience, applicable to Charleston’s cultivation of its own leisure tourist class, and the tourists’ ideas and desires when visiting.

Charleston’s status as a popular tourist destination arose within the greater scene of the rise of tourism in America, and particularly in the American South. The nineteenth century showed increased industrialization and economic resources and a new way of thinking about the world; this allowed tourism in America to begin to change into its twentieth century form. Affluence and cultural curiosity developed among a new class of Americans in the twentieth century who sought to experience something different from their normal lives through visiting other places. In *Devil’s Bargains*, a book about tourism development in the western United States, historian Hal Rothman notes:

The conventions of tourism and the social and economic structures it encourages are products of mercantile and industrial wealth and the leisure they create. Without the technological transformation that accompanied industrialization, without the transportation networks, the broader distribution of goods, and the spread of cultural conventions through newly invented media, the combination of enlightenment, affirmation, recreation and leisure that is twentieth-century tourism would not exist.<sup>27</sup>

Rothman accurately appraises the combination of forces serving as a catalyst for increased tourism.

Ultimately, possession of money and time allowed individuals to travel, but the desire to do so is highly affected by the desire to affirm their social status; in other words, the choices people make regarding travel are directly correlated to those their peers make. In American tourism, technological

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feature trips to the outer buildings and slave quarters, recreated to look as they would have at the time. Another example of “back regions” in Charleston is the house tours of the 1950s and 1960s undertaken by the Historic Charleston Foundation, where tourists could enter the habitations of current Charlestonians, seeing how a twentieth century elite Charlestonian lived.

<sup>26</sup> More information on “back regions” and staged authenticity of tourist attractions in MacCannell’s *The Tourist*, pages 94-101.

<sup>27</sup> Hal Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 30.

developments—the rise of the railroads and then automobiles—increased the volume of tourism by making distant places more accessible to the population. As a middle class developed in America, travel was democratized, allowing those less wealthy to share experiences with the rich but in less time and with less money.<sup>28</sup> The growing middle class transformed American tourism into a collection of activities giving people a glimpse into the lives of the “natives.”

Tourism in the South emerged from a number of factors, and has had a pronounced influence in the changes in southern culture. People came, and still do come, to the South seeking its beauty, history and leisure activities. Recently, southern tourist destinations have broadened the scope of their offerings to visitors in order to accommodate and attract people from all walks of life. Ted Ownby, in an essay in *Southern Journeys*, humorously comments on the multiplicity of attractions: “guidebooks and state agencies likewise urge tourists to look at old houses, but if you don’t like old houses or just get tired of them, look, we have attractions just as good as anybody’s. We’ll play the part of keepers of the past, they say, but if you don’t like that, we’ll play other parts as well.”<sup>29</sup> For its part, Charleston, famous for its history and physical beauty, put effort into building up its beaches, golfing, shopping and cultural attractions to have something to offer to anyone. But with this increased assortment of leisure activities, the face of the South has been altered to suit the tourists’ every whim. The nature of a city melds to the desires of the travelers, regardless of how this affects the residents, and a constructed image is relayed to the visitors. In Charleston, the character of the city that gets transmitted to visitors is, in essence, created by the visitors’ demand for this image rather than an authentic cityscape. In twentieth century Charleston, numerous organizations contributed to interpreting the visitors’ demands for a certain image; as the tourism industry expanded, new civic tourist and preservation organizations emerged with their own interpretation of the past and ways of packaging this past to consumers of tourism.

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<sup>28</sup> Richard D. Starnes, introduction to *Southern Journeys: Tourism, History and Culture in the Modern South* ed. Richard D. Starnes (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>29</sup> Ted Ownby, “Nobody Knows the Troubles I’ve Seen, but Does Anyone Want to Hear about Them When They’re on Vacation” in *Southern Journeys* ed. Richard D. Starnes (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 247.

### **Part III: Establishment and Accomplishments of Charleston Tourist and Preservation Organizations**

Charlestonians and travelers alike felt that there was much worth visiting and preserving in Charleston; some felt that preserving the past allowed them to retain their elite status, some felt that the landmarks themselves were invaluable historically and architecturally, and some wished to preserve the ambiance and values that accompanied the history, tradition and social hierarchy. Over the course of the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, numerous entities endeavored to protect the city's historical integrity and cultivate the tourism industry. The different bodies all worked in their own ways, with their own agendas and their own results yet each contributed to developing tourism in Charleston, whether working together or alone. Some entities proved to be rigid to change in some instances, preferring to cling to tradition rather than embrace innovations. Nonetheless, the tourism industry developed, partially because it was this untainted history that tourists sought. Various organizations contributed to preservation and tourism; their efforts shaped the nature of tourists' desires, and Charlestonian reactions that followed. These organizations fall into two categories—the municipal bodies, including the Charleston Chamber of Commerce and the city government of Charleston, and the civic organizations founded and funded privately by Charleston's elite individuals working to preserve the city's historical integrity.

The Charleston Chamber of Commerce had been active in the city's business affairs since colonial times. Yet the Chamber's efforts to attract tourism and convention business were somewhat haphazard until the middle of the century. The committee responsible for tourism constantly changed its name, slogans, targeted actions and goals throughout the first half of the century. The Chamber occasionally published pamphlets meant for distribution to tourists and geared towards featuring different aspects of Charleston as a tourist destination; but these early pamphlets lacked a cohesive strategy in attracting tourists. Charleston sought a slogan that would make it appear as a unique and significant place to visit but that would commit it to no single aspect in particular. For example, as early as 1904, the

Chamber of Commerce published a twenty four page booklet entitled “Historic and Picturesque Charleston,” touting Charleston as a winter resort. Charleston had previously been known as a short vacation destination during the spring and summer, due to its famous beaches and horticultural splendor. The pamphlet sought to alert readers to the outdoor sports and historical attractions Charleston could offer tourists during the winter months.<sup>30</sup> This pamphlet publicizes the slogan “Historic and Picturesque Charleston.” Only eight years later however, in 1912, the Tourist and Convention League turned to promoting a different slogan, “Charleston, The City that is Different.”<sup>31</sup> Finally, in 1923, Mayor Thomas Stoney, a great advocate of the tourism industry’s development, stumbled on a successful slogan, and organizations in the city including the Chamber of Commerce began advertising Charleston as “America’s Most Historic City.” The coveted slogan did not go uncontested. Fredericksburg, Virginia alleged that it had already claimed the slogan, challenging Charleston to a debate to determine who got use of the name. Though the debate never occurred, Charleston’s debate representative had been prepared to uphold Charleston as “America’s Most Historic City.”<sup>32</sup> This would be the principal slogan appearing in promotional copy for Charleston from the 1920s onward.

The Chamber of Commerce emphasized the possible economic impact that increased tourism could have for its member businesses. In 1912, the Tourist and Convention League, requesting contributions to a fund for entertaining convention delegates, argued that each delegate would spend at least \$5 per day, and they would spend it in Charleston’s businesses. Furthermore, with the aid of a booklet distributed to conventioners, they would be more likely to enter into a business advertised and pointed out on a map inside it. The Chamber of Commerce kept up similar endeavors to create funds for entertainment and promotion of Charleston as a private tourist and group conventioner destination

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<sup>30</sup> “Historic and Picturesque Charleston,” Pamphlet issued by the Charleston Chamber of Commerce, 1904, Pamphlet Collection, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

<sup>31</sup> “The Charlestonian,” Published by the Chamber of Commerce, 22 March 1912, Charleston Chamber of Commerce Journal Collection, South Carolina Historical, Charleston, SC.

<sup>32</sup> “Tourist Business History Traced,” (*Charleston News and Courier*, 6 April, 1939).

through contributions from individual businesses.<sup>33</sup> The Chamber of Commerce could only endeavor to entice tourists with the support of the businesses that contributed to its operations, so it emphasized these particular businesses to visiting tourists.

The tourism division of the Chamber of Commerce engaged in various other activities through the first half of the twentieth century, including placing promotional materials in tourism offices, advertising Charleston's advantages on the big screen and creating a tourism center to accommodate visitors' questions. In 1917, the Chamber asserted in a Memorandum that the Committee on Tourists would work towards "looking after the accommodation of tourists, suitable advertising in Northern and Southern newspapers during the tourist season, and placing attractive advertising matter, which will appeal to tourists, in the various passenger offices throughout the country."<sup>34</sup> This statement demonstrates their conception of how a tourism bureau should function. To judge from the various efforts to revitalize the tourism branch of the Chamber of Commerce through the twentieth century however, it must have encountered difficulty in carrying out the aforementioned goals.

To supplement the actions of its tourism office, the Chamber of Commerce embarked on a campaign to publicize Charleston in movie theaters around the country through short films plugging its advantages as a vacation destination. In April of 1925, the minutes of the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors' meeting indicates that they were looking into displaying facts about Charleston and its draws on national screens. Then in 1932, the film "An Old City Speaks" appeared, touting Charleston as having a storybook past and a heritage of patriotism—perfect for visitors seeking a historical and satisfying vacation.<sup>35</sup> Once the tourists were drawn to Charleston, the Chamber sought to keep them there, entertained and spending money in local businesses. In 1924, the Chamber built a "Reading and Rest Room" in its downtown offices, where tourists could meet and gather information about the

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<sup>33</sup> "The Charlestonian" Published by the Chamber of Commerce.

<sup>34</sup> "Memorandum of estimated expenditure necessary to conduct a campaign for securing tourists and conventions for Charleston," 1917, Charleston Chamber of Commerce Records, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

<sup>35</sup> *An Old City Speaks*, video recording, Charleston Museum, Charleston, SC.

attractions of the area.<sup>36</sup> Then, much later in 1950, the Junior Chamber of Commerce, an offshoot of the Chamber of Commerce for younger businessmen and administrators, opened a tourist information center in a different part of town, aiming to attract visitors on their way into town from the Southern direction. The information center was opened “as a courtesy to travelers and with the view to keeping visitors in Charleston an extra few days.”<sup>37</sup> Charleston struggled with keeping visitors for more than a night, especially on their way to or from Florida, so this information center represented the Chamber’s effort to retain and get more business from these customers than in the past.

The Chamber of Commerce was not the sole municipal body advancing tourism in Charleston; the city acted in many ways to fulfill what it believed to be its destiny as a popular vacation destination in the Southern states. The city’s actions can be traced through an annual Year Book, published in the years 1924 through 1951. This Year Book allowed Charleston citizens to read about the actions of the city administration from the year before. It always included a report from the Mayor, followed by reports from various Committees and Commissioners. The Year Book was first published during the administration of Mayor Thomas Stoney, who served as mayor from 1924 until 1932. Mayor Stoney is regarded as the first mayor to take an interest in and actively pursue the tourism industry. With roots in a prominent Low Country family (former slaveholders), Stoney worked with the city’s elite preservationists to draw tourists to a specific vision of Charleston. Historian Stephanie Yuhl posits, “Perhaps his personal associations with the region’s past, coupled with his desire to resurrect the local economy, made Stoney more sympathetic than Grace [the previous mayor] to celebrations of the elite past through tourism.”<sup>38</sup> Whatever the reason for Stoney’s commitment to increasing tourism, the evidence of this commitment is clear in the actions and rhetoric of his administration. In his inaugural address in December of 1923, Stoney declared, “There is every reason to believe that Charleston will soon develop into a great tourist

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<sup>36</sup> Megis B. Russell, “Report of the Manager of the Charleston Chamber of Commerce,” (*Charleston) News & Courier*, 18 February 1924.

<sup>37</sup> “Do You Know Your Charleston?” (*Charleston) News & Courier*, 31 July 1950.

<sup>38</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 162.

resort; and it will be my great effort to promote this development in every way practicable.”<sup>39</sup> During his term in office and even beyond it as he involved himself in various preservation organizations, Stoney proved his dedication to the tourism industry.

Mayor Stoney believed that the first step in attracting tourists to Charleston was informing Charlestonians themselves about the attractions of the city, and its historical and cultural importance; he said “we are sometimes prone to take it for granted that the average Charlestonian is familiar with these points of historical interest and significance.”<sup>40</sup> Stoney went on to elaborate on a few things that the Charleston citizens should know, and titles the section “Charleston, America’s Most Historic City,” declaring this as his slogan for Charleston.<sup>41</sup> A large part of Stoney’s tourism initiative centered on modernizing the city and making it more accessible to a new visiting audience who expected convenience and modern developments. For example, in the 1925 Annual Review from the Year Book, he called for a new passenger train station in Charleston so that tourists would not bypass the city on their way down the coast.<sup>42</sup> Years later, in the 1930 Annual Review, Stoney applauded the improvements to the tourism infrastructure made during the six years of his administration: “It is only in the past few years that modern Charleston’s enterprise and initiative have so surrounded the visitor to this city with the modern conveniences and comforts essential to present day traveling.” He celebrated the construction of modern hotels, the development of more recreational sports, increased railroad passenger services, the construction of a new airport and increased highway connections to the Low Country area.<sup>43</sup> It was surprising that Stoney, an elite Charlestonian, expressed such a strong dedication to modernizations in Charleston; he believed that the best of old Charleston could only be explored by substantial numbers of tourists using the advancements of the day. At a time when many elites spoke out against modern

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<sup>39</sup> Journal of the City Council, 1923, 1254.

<sup>40</sup> “Mayor Stoney’s Annual Review,” *Year Book, City of Charleston* (1924), lvi.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, liv-lv. Here Stoney elaborates on the treasures housed in the Charleston Museum and paintings housed in the City Council Chamber, urging that they create a fire-proof building to safeguard the paintings from the City Council Chamber from ruin and preserve the city’s history.

<sup>42</sup> “Mayor Stoney’s Annual Review,” *Year Book, City of Charleston* (1925), xlvii.

<sup>43</sup> “Mayor Stoney’s Annual Review,” *Year Book, City of Charleston* (1930), xx-xxi.

innovations as corrupting their city, Stoney stood out as a voice for simultaneous progress and preservation.

In March of 1933, the city government created a new commission for the promotion and preservation of the historical authenticity and character of the city. The Historical Commission theorized about how to get visitors to Charleston, and keep them there longer. The Commission met with a group of “hotel men,” or hotel operators, early in 1935 and decided that in order to extend the stays of visitors they would put historical maps and pamphlets in official Historical Commission envelopes in the mailboxes of hotel visitors.<sup>44</sup> The Historical Commission also endeavored to put bronze historical markers up through the city, using funds obtained through the New Deal’s Works Progress Administration. The markers were an ongoing project, with a varying number being produced each year depending on the other priorities of the Commission and the state of their funding. For example, during World War II, the Commission suspended its erection of historical markers in order to put effort into wartime production.<sup>45</sup> Another priority of the Commission was a petition to the National Park Service to designate Charleston’s harbor forts as national monuments. The Historical Commission reported in the 1946 Year Book that the National Park Service was in the process of making the forts national monuments.<sup>46</sup> This would prove to be an important development in Charleston’s tourism, with the Forts Moultrie and Sumter drawing tourists interested in military history from around the country.

The mayors and administrations after Mayor Stoney were not idle during the years the Historical Commission was erecting historical markers and working to establish national monuments. The city worked to fight highway redirection away from Charleston, and advertised Charleston’s advantages on routes near the city. In 1947, the Office of Port and Public Relations reported that “cooperating with the Charleston Chamber of Commerce a number of tourist advertisements were carried in various newspapers

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<sup>44</sup> “Historical Commission Report,” *Year Book, City of Charleston* (1932-1935), 242-243.

<sup>45</sup> “Historical Commission Report,” *Year Book, City of Charleston* (1936), 165. And “Historical Commission Report,” *Year Book, City of Charleston* (1941), 172-173.

<sup>46</sup> “Historical Commission Report,” *Year Book, City of Charleston* (1946), 162.

and other publications and two road signs were repainted and maintained.”<sup>47</sup> Even such small and seemingly mundane actions impacted Charleston’s visitors, drawing them in from surrounding areas and highways to experience a couple days of Charleston charm. The joint efforts of the city and the Chamber of Commerce in advertising the advantages of the city, its tourism and businesses continued through the coming decades.<sup>48</sup>

Though the publication of the Year Book ceased in 1951, the city certainly did not terminate its work on increasing tourism traffic to Charleston. In 1967, for example, the city commissioned a New York public relations firm, Ruder & Finn, to carry out a survey of Charleston’s needs and resources for its tourism business. The report, entitled “Charleston: The Historic City with a Future,” was published for the residents of the city in serial form in Charleston’s daily newspaper *The News & Courier*. Some of the report’s recommendations called for more varied entertainment and leisure activities to attract different types of tourists, beach resorts to draw those seeking a resort vacation, and a unified representation of the downtown historical district.<sup>49</sup> The significant actions of the municipal government provided infrastructure for tourism development and laid the path for private organizations to take action in developing specific sites and a distinctive character for Charleston’s tourism.

The second group of organizations contributing to Charleston’s tourism industry consisted of private organizations working to preserve and share the city’s architectural and historical heritage with Charlestonians and visitors alike. Historian Robert R. Weyeneth, who wrote about the work of the Historic Charleston Foundation, notes that “Charleston faced loss of landmark buildings a number of times in the first years of the twentieth century, and these threats galvanized heritage groups into action.”<sup>50</sup> In the face of the destruction of historic and architecturally significant buildings in the 1910s through the 1930s, the early preservation societies worked to save and preserve the historical integrity of

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<sup>47</sup> “Office of Port and Public Relations Report,” *Year Book, City of Charleston* (1947), 163.

<sup>48</sup> Collaborations between the two municipal bodies are mentioned in subsequent Year Books, for example in the *Year Book, City of Charleston* (1949-1951), as well as in the records of the Chamber of Commerce.

<sup>49</sup> “Text of Ruder & Finn Report,” (*Charleston*) *News and Courier*, 30 May-1 June, 1967.

<sup>50</sup> Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 1.

the city. In 1920, the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings was founded to rescue the Joseph Manigault House, an antebellum mansion in Charleston that would become a popular tourist attraction, from destruction. In the coming years, the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings would take action in architectural zoning issues and providing for the purchase and preservation of numerous other old houses. The purchase of the Manigault House, and later the Heyward-Washington House, proved to be problematic for the Society to manage alone, so it began working with the Charleston Museum to preserve houses and subsequently open them to the public.<sup>51</sup> The accomplishments in the struggle to save these two historic homes, among other endeavors, served as milestones in the early preservation movement of the city.

The next organization to be instituted as a private preservation society was the Civic Services Committee, started in the spring of 1940 by Charlestonians prominent in the arts and the city's social scene. This committee represented a foray into urban preservation by the Carolina Art Association, a fine arts society dating back to antebellum years. The Committee did not conceive its role as one of city planning and building; rather, founding member Frederick Law Olmstead vocalized their objectives in May of 1940 saying, "Whatever else the Committee is concerned with it is very centrally concerned with some intangible values peculiar to Charleston, which are of much present and still greater potential importance if the physical things and conditions that give rise to them can be adequately safeguarded, but which are exceedingly liable to progressive diminution and irrecoverable loss."<sup>52</sup> This ambiguous statement indicated that the Committee's aim to preserve the "intangible values" of Charleston went along directly with preserving the aesthetic visuals and authenticity of the downtown area. The work of the various elite preservation organizations in Charleston would often draw a connection between preservation of physical buildings and spaces and the safeguarding of a certain historical and social

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 4-8.

<sup>52</sup> "The Civic Services Committee: Work and Objectives" Pamphlet produced by the Civic Services Committee, 1944, Civic Services Committee Folder 1, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC.

ambiance—the values of Charleston’s past that persisted into Charleston’s future through its adherence to history and tradition.

The early work of the Civic Services Committee included studies of community growth, a large survey of the city’s historic architecture, and a plan to control downtown traffic.<sup>53</sup> The results of the architectural survey were made public in an exhibition and pamphlet entitled “This is Charleston,” that emphasized that the city’s “unique national value is an educational as well as an architectural value.”<sup>54</sup> This statement emphasized the Committee’s view that the urban landscape of Charleston was unique—it was an example of a relatively untouched and intact historic city. They trusted that the city was valuable as a resource to show people how the past looked, and without preservation of the city’s architecture and setting, this resource would deteriorate.

The actions of the Civic Services Committee in its short existence from 1940-1947 laid the groundwork for the establishment of the Historic Charleston Foundation, which was founded and replaced the Civic Services Committee in 1947. In a pamphlet announcing its founding and calling for funding, the founders of the Historic Charleston Foundation, many former members of the Civic Services Committee, alleged that “in spite of the good efforts of government, individuals, businesses and organizations, many of Charleston’s fine architectural assets are not being preserved nor fully used in the community.”<sup>55</sup> The Foundation was proposed as a non-profit educational institution whose purpose would be “the preservation and use of the architectural and historic treasures of the Charleston area.”<sup>56</sup> The Foundation would receive funds and property as gifts or donations, and proposed that it would utilize these assets to remodel and restore buildings, thereby improving the community. It is important to note

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<sup>53</sup> “The Civic Services Committee: Work and Objectives,” Pamphlet produced by the Civic Services Committee.

<sup>54</sup> “The National Value of Charleston as a City,” Pamphlet “This is Charleston,” produced by the Civic Services Committee, Civic Services Committee Folder 32, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC.

<sup>55</sup> “Historic Charleston,” Pamphlet produced by the Civic Services Committee in forming the Historic Charleston Foundation, Civic Services Committee Folder 63, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC, 6. See Figure 3 in the Image Appendix.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

that in the beginning its purpose was not to keep buildings as museums, “save in exceptional cases,”<sup>57</sup> an assertion that they stuck with, only operating a few houses as museums through their years of work.

In 1948, the Historic Charleston Foundation began one significant part of its contribution to Charleston’s tourist business by sponsoring what would become an annual spring tour showcasing the splendor of some of Charleston’s still privately-owned historical homes. These tours continued yearly, drawing people from outside Charleston interested in seeing the antiques and architecture of antebellum and colonial period homes as well as the behind-the-scenes lives of contemporary elite Charlesotnians.<sup>58</sup> These tours, meant to raise money for the Foundation’s revolving fund to preserve and restore houses, drew very successful publicity, with articles appearing in nationally circulated publications including *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Town and Country*, *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Harper’s Bazaar*. These tours gave visitors a taste of what it was like to live in Charleston in the past and in the present.<sup>59</sup>

In 1955, the Foundation purchased the Nathaniel Russell House, a historic home in need of preservation located in Charleston’s downtown historic district. The foundation sought to supplement its fundraising by opening the mansion to the public as a museum. After a series of renovations and restorations to the home, it opened to the public in 1956. The Russell House quickly became a popular attraction for tourists, gaining “an enviable reputation as a Charleston showplace.”<sup>60</sup> It did become a showplace for all of Charleston, for Charlestonians not only donated the funds for its purchase, but also collections of antiques and artifacts for use in the house museum. The Russell House attracted national press, much like the foundation’s annual spring tours, and was designated a National Historic Landmark by the mid-1970s.<sup>61</sup> Revenues from the Nathaniel Russell House and the house tours allowed the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> The motivations of tourists coming to the Historic Charleston Foundation’s house tours will be explored further in Chapter 3.

<sup>59</sup> “Annual Report,” Annual Reports of the Tours Director, 1949-1954, Board of Trustees Minutes, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC.

<sup>60</sup> Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 41.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 50.

foundation to raise money for a revolving fund to buy and preserve local structures. The revolving fund used a very small amount of capital to purchase, renovate and sell historic buildings for use in the present community.

In 1957, the foundation launched a neighborhood revitalization project called the Ansonborough project. In the neighborhood of Ansonborough, buildings were rehabilitated for contemporary use—functioning as useful structures in the community rather than being converted into museums. Weyeneth notes, “With the Ansonborough project, the Historic Charleston Foundation dramatically transformed one Charleston neighborhood and brought national recognition to itself and the City of Charleston. Through the innovative use of a revolving fund, the foundation demonstrated the possibilities of a broad areawide approach to historic preservation using a small amount of capital as a catalyst to private investment and restoration.”<sup>62</sup> Though the Ansonborough project allowed a number of houses to be saved, the revitalization of the neighborhood also pushed out a number of the area’s original residents, mostly black, creating a neighborhood gentrification. Despite this unfavorable consequence, the Historic Charleston Foundation’s work combined preservation for the integrity and amelioration of the city and the lives of its inhabitants, through the Ansonborough project, with museums such as the Russell House attracting tourists and publicity from around the country. All of the municipal and private organizations working for Charleston’s tourism industry and preservation efforts put their on mark on the nature of Charleston’s tourism through the twentieth century, creating the vision of Charleston and the attractions that tourists came from near and far to enjoy.

#### **Part IV: A Glimpse of Charming Charleston Today**

Golf courses aside, the Charleston that tourists see today in many ways appears to resemble the nineteenth century city.<sup>63</sup> The main part of Charleston is on a peninsula located between the Ashley and

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>63</sup> For the most part, this section relies on my own knowledge and impressions of Charleston. Having spent long periods of time there, I know the layout and the tourist sites fairly well. When I rely on other sources for

the Cooper Rivers where they feed into the Atlantic Ocean; Charleston's historic district is located at the tip of this peninsula. Charleston's skyline is very low, with no significantly high buildings, especially in the historic district.<sup>64</sup> The side streets are narrow, and many times cobblestone, giving visitors the impression of being in a peaceful and leisurely eighteenth or nineteenth century world.<sup>65</sup> One of the older sections of the city, called Battery or High Battery, where the most impressive historical mansions are located, gives passersby a glimpse into the colonial and antebellum world of affluence. High walls and gates hide impressive gardens and the famous side porches (called piazzas) radiate tropical charm. The color palate of this historical section of the city is one of the more famous aspects of Charleston; many of the houses are covered with pastel-shaded plaster so any given Charleston street has houses of all colors of the rainbow. The vegetation in private gardens and along the streets contributes to the colonial, tropical atmosphere, dominated by live oaks hung with Spanish moss, and South Carolina palmetto trees. The combination of the unusual color palate, the sultry temperatures, the tropical flowers and trees and the leisurely attitude of the inhabitants makes Charleston resemble a Caribbean island more than a Southern metropolis.

Amidst this backdrop sit Charleston's main historical tourist attractions that fall largely into four categories: downtown historical mansions, military monuments, the ambiance of downtown Charleston (including its churches and public buildings) and the Low Country plantations. Although one could view many of Charleston's houses as historical mansions, only a few of them have been converted into museums accessible to the public as tourist attractions. Some of the most impressive mansions remain in private ownership, sometimes still in the families that have owned them for centuries. A few downtown mansions open to the public include the Edmondston-Alston house, the Nathaniel Russell house and the Aiken-Rhett house.

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information, such as the websites of the tourist attractions, or the Charleston Convention and Visitors Bureau, I will take note. This section, though it describes the Charleston of present day, is directly correlated to the Charleston that developed over the course of the twentieth century, thus an understanding of its landmarks and tourist attractions is integral to understand the city and its current tourism industry.

<sup>64</sup> See Figure 4 in the Image Appendix for a visual of the Charleston Skyline.

<sup>65</sup> See Figure 5 in the Image Appendix for a visual of Charleston Streets.

The Edmondston-Alston house, located on the Battery and looking out over the Charleston harbor, allows visitors to see how antebellum planters may have lived in their city dwellings. Built in 1825 and still furnished in the fashion of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the house contains many of the rice-planting Alston family treasures, including paintings, china and books. Built and added to in the Greek revival style popular at the time, the house features piazzas on three floors and stucco in a muted pink color.<sup>66</sup>

Also located near High Battery, the Nathaniel Russell house portrays a similar time period for a merchant family. The 1808 townhouse was constructed in the Federal style, and boasts the architectural triumph of a free-flying staircase and elaborate plaster ornamentations. Tours of the house highlight the architectural features and elements of the gracious lifestyle of the city's elites in the antebellum period. The Historical Charleston Foundation, which operates the Nathaniel Russell house, has also endeavored to interpret the lives of the African Americans living in the Nathaniel Russell house in the antebellum period, with exhibits and highlights on the tour addressing the slave trade and the lives of the slaves working in the Russell household.<sup>67</sup>

The Aiken-Rhett house, located in a more northern part of the Charleston peninsula, exemplifies the conservation approach. In contrast to restoration, the conservation approach means the house, built in 1818, has not been restored or altered since around 1858. Also differentiating it from the Edmondston-Alston house and the Nathaniel Russell house is the fact that the Aiken-Rhett house exhibits the original dependencies to the town house, including the slave quarters, kitchen and carriage house, all located in the back of the lot. That the Aiken-Rhett house is conserved means that many of the items in the rooms appear to be in bad condition, but they are actually remarkably well preserved for their time period, and are historically accurate to the house, being in the same location that they would have been in 1850. This historical home, owned by the Aiken family until 1975, highlights the conservation method and the

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<sup>66</sup> The Edmondston-Alston House, operated by Middleton Place Plantation, *middletonplace.org*, 2006. <http://www.middletonplace.org/default.asp?catID=4515> (15 Oct 2006). See Figure 6 in the Image Appendix.

<sup>67</sup> The Nathaniel Russell House, operated by the Historic Charleston Foundation, *historiccharleston.org*, 2006. <http://www.historiccharleston.org/experience/nrh/index.html> (15 Oct 2006).

experiences of the entire urban household, including the household slave culture, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, rather than the elite culture and restoration emphasized in the other two historic townhouses mentioned.<sup>68</sup>

Due to the role Charleston played in both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, there are significant military monuments that draw tourists interested in military history from around the country. The two primary military attractions of the Charleston region are Forts Moultrie and Sumter. Fort Moultrie is the site of the first American victory over the British Navy during the Revolutionary War in 1776. The victory at the palmetto-log Fort Moultrie electrified the American quest for independence, and is commemorated at the fort. Visitors to the fort not only learn of its role in the Revolutionary War, but also the defense of the coastline through the centuries.<sup>69</sup> Its more famous cousin, Fort Sumter, is the main military attraction in Charleston. In 1861, eruption of gunfire on the United States forces stationed at Fort Sumter served as the catalyst to the outbreak of the Civil War. Fort Sumter serves as a memorial to those from the North and South who fought the war that started there. Both forts attract families, providing an exciting historical and military narrative for children and parents alike.<sup>70</sup>

Guidebooks to Charleston and Charlestonians themselves emphasize the importance of lacing up your shoes and hitting the streets to experience Charleston's ambiance. Walking tours of Charleston highlight magnificent homes and gardens, civic and public buildings, churches and picturesque streets. Some of the highlights of Charleston's public buildings downtown include the Market Hall, with vendors selling souvenirs, and older black women weaving the city's recognizable sweetgrass baskets. The City Hall and the Courthouse date back to the early years of the country, and the White Point Gardens at the tip of the Battery commemorate Charleston and its citizens' roles in the country's wars. There are numerous historical churches and graveyards, the most notable being St. Michael's Episcopal Church. Built in 1752-61, St. Michael's Church has bells and a clock imported from England, which were

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<sup>68</sup> The Aiken-Rhett House, operated by the Historic Charleston Foundation, *historiccharleston.org*, 2006. <http://www.historiccharleston.org/experience/arh/index.html> (15 Oct 2006). See Figure 7 in the Image Appendix.

<sup>69</sup> Fort Moultrie, operated by the National Park Service, *nps.gov*, 2006. [http://www.nps.gov/fosu/historyculture/fort\\_moultrie.htm](http://www.nps.gov/fosu/historyculture/fort_moultrie.htm) (15 Oct 2006).

<sup>70</sup> Fort Sumter, operated by the National Park Service, *nps.gov*, 2006. <http://www.nps.gov/fosu/index.htm> (15 Oct 2006).

removed during the Revolution by the English, and again during the Civil War for safekeeping. The Churchyard at St. Michael's is the resting place of two signers of the U.S. Constitution, and numerous historically famous Charlestonians. The Circular Congregational Church was organized back in 1681, though its building dates from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and here is the oldest graveyard in the city, with graves dating back to 1695.<sup>71</sup> Charleston's downtown historical district is so dense that one historical building or monument practically sits on top of another. The mélange of quaint colonial buildings, picturesque streets, and striking antebellum mansions gives visitors a sense that in Charleston's downtown, they are literally walking through history.

The plantations and gardens outside of Charleston proper have long drawn visitors seeking both historic and horticultural spectacles. The plantations are preserved to varying degrees, but the gardens of most of them boast carefully planned and tended formal and informal gardens. The most notable plantations outside Charleston are Middleton Place, Boone Hall Plantation and Drayton Hall. Middleton Place, located on the Ashley River, was acquired and the Middleton family in the 1740s. The politically active family's plantation house was ransacked and burned by General Sherman's army in 1865, leaving only the gentlemen's guest quarters. Visitors to Middleton Place get a concrete view of antebellum life, with plantation stable yards and work houses highlighting the day-to-day world of a rice plantation, a slave family dwelling called "Eliza's House," an experimental rice field, and breathtaking gardens and lakes. Tourists can take a number of guided tours, and can even take a ride on a horse-drawn carriage around the plantation, allowing them to experience antebellum life for themselves. African American history is highlighted in a tour covering Eliza's House, the rice fields and the slave graveyard, while planter history is covered in a tour of the remaining guest house and the gardens.<sup>72</sup> Middleton Place is the

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<sup>71</sup> Nita Swann, *The Complete Walking Tour of Historic Charleston* (Charleston: Charleston Publishing Co., 1986). This is a pamphlet sold at various tourist attractions written by Nita Swann, a licensed guide for the City of Charleston.

<sup>72</sup> Gerard and Patricia Gutek, *Plantations and Outdoor Museums in America's Historic South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 251-256. See Figure 8 in the Image Appendix.

most frequently visited plantation in the Charleston region, probably because of the broad subject matter it covers—planter history, slave life and landscaped gardens.

Boone Hall Plantation may stir déjà-vu for first-time visitors due to its status as a favorite spot for the film-makers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The stately 20<sup>th</sup> Century mansion, the original avenue of live oaks and the row of slave cabins evoke stereotypical images of antebellum plantations that make it ideal for film-makers and visitors seeking a particular image of plantation life. Films such as *The Notebook*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Queen*, and *North and South* have utilized the Boone Hall backdrop, particularly the avenue of live oaks draped with Spanish moss.<sup>73</sup> Visitors to Boone Hall can experience aspects of slave life through live interactive presentations and exhibits in the slave cabins. Additionally, Boone Hall remains a working plantation, showcasing agricultural changes over the course of the centuries.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, Drayton Hall draws tourists for similar reasons as the Aiken-Rhett house—it is a conserved original plantation house dating to the 1740s, with the rooms unfurnished to highlight the original detailing of the house. Drayton Hall, an example of symmetrical Georgian Palladian architecture, belongs to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a prestigious nonprofit organization encouraging the preservation of significant American sites. Though privately owned by the Drayton family for 200 years, it was never modernized due to lack of economic resources in the family, leaving it in much the same state as in its colonial, revolutionary and antebellum periods. Drayton Hall draws visitors seeking an original and intact colonial plantation house, complete with ornate detailing on the ceilings, cornices and moldings and even some original paint specimens.<sup>75</sup> Though its state of conservation, rather than restoration, renders it hard to imagine what living in the house would have been like, Drayton Hall remains the most historically accurate plantation in the region.

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<sup>73</sup> Though *Gone with the Wind* was filmed on a Hollywood set, the filmmakers used images from Boone Hall Plantation to create the entry way of live oaks leading to Twelve Oaks Plantation in the movie. See Figure 9 in the Image Appendix.

<sup>74</sup> Gutek, *Plantations and Outdoor Museums in America's Historic South*, 257-260.

<sup>75</sup> Gutek, *Plantations and Outdoor Museums in America's Historic South*, 247-249.

### **Conclusion: The Path that Charleston Chose**

Did Charleston choose its path towards the industry of tourism? Or was it simply well suited to it? The combination of Charleston's rich history and enticing atmosphere certainly suggested that tourism would be a logical and profitable path to take. Tourism offered Charleston the chance to pursue and preserve the main elements it prized in its history and setting—the persistence of its pseudo-aristocracy, its physical historic and aesthetic landmarks, and the intangible values and traditions that were attached to both the social and physical elements of the city. Yet, as logical and profitable as tourism may have seemed, tourism did not progress without debate and snags along the way. The tourism industry would be challenged from within and from without as the city's elites fought to keep the authenticity of their physical spaces, and those more commercially driven fought to open the door to not only the country's tourists but industrial and commercial opportunities as well. The need for revenue and the desire to preserve Charleston's history through "heritage tourism" sanctioned by the city's elite community forced selective progression in the city and its industrial development. Thus Charleston would continue on a path rich in romance and tradition, whether authentic or staged, but with the spit-fire personality and occasional controversy that had marked its entire history.

## Chapter 2

### “Invariably Polite but Impenetrably Resistant”

The dawning of the twentieth century brought many innovations to the American way of life. With the increasing prevalence of electricity, consumer goods and automobiles, Americans demanded more from their time and for their comfort. Gone were the times when travelers could spend days just getting to a destination, and Americans expected to be able to live in a certain level of comfort even when traveling away from home. The modern advancements of the twentieth century met a reluctant reception in Charleston. Elite Charlestonians were committed to the unhurried lifestyle, manners and customs their ancestors had been enjoying for as long as a few centuries. Their collective memory and pride in their glorified heritage made them disinclined to easily accept modern challenges to their way of life or their control over the social hierarchy, culture and civic undertakings.

The rigidity of this deep-rooted elite population manifested itself in a battle of sorts between old and new in Charleston; history, memory and tradition confronted modernization and industrialization. Some believed the old and new could blend to create the ideal Charleston; some commercially driven Charlestonians, and especially non-Charlestonians, believed the modern would have to triumph over antiquity for the economic vitality of the city; and conversely some (mostly elite Charlestonians) believed industrialization and other modern elements would corrupt their beloved city's historic identity, along with their own sense of entitlement. Commitment to preservation and conservation proved to be the solution for many of these proud Charlestonians and in this endeavor to preserve their past, they added to Charleston's tourist appeal. Yet tourists would not come to an un-modernized Charleston, as they expected certain comforts while traveling. Thus the needs of the economically important tourism industry forced these elites to come to terms with change. Modern Charleston producers of tourism and culture struggled to unify history and modernity, past and present, in an appealing and commercially viable way, carefully avoiding compromising historical authenticity and integrity.

## Part I: Charleston's Persistent Aristocracy

Charleston existed in the twentieth century as a peculiar microcosm, where elements left over from the colonial era blended with hundreds of years of subsequent history and social change to form a society pulled in two directions: one clinging to the relics of the past and the other pushing towards a modernized American future. Charlestonian and historian Robert Molloy describes the eccentricity of Charleston in introducing his study on the city's history in 1947: "In a civilization for which size is usually the criterion of importance, the little city of Charleston, South Carolina, retains and constantly enlarges its own peculiar prestige—a reputation for aristocratic appearance, punctilious manners and an atmosphere of unforgettable individuality."<sup>76</sup> Molloy emphasizes two central characteristics of Charleston's distinctiveness, its "aristocratic appearance" and its manners or hospitality, both elements praised by tourists of the twentieth century. Charleston was indeed distinct from other cities in the beginning and middle of the twentieth century, and many of its characteristics derived from a social order verging on aristocracy that had persisted since its colonial era.

Charleston's social stratification and the elite families' sense of entitlement emanated from the culture and large fortunes that derived from rice cultivation in the Low Country. Plantations were larger there than in other areas of the South because the land was better suited to large tracts, and wealth enabled slave owners to own larger numbers of slaves. These elite plantation owners congregated in Charleston, the center of social and commercial life starting in the eighteenth century. At that time, the class structure was flexible, admitting recent arrivals without name or wealth into the elite once they proved their material worth by making a fortune in the area. After the eighteenth century however, entrance into the elite class closed off and certain families or clans banded together, solidifying their wealth and status in a closely related network of business and social relations. In the antebellum era, this group of blue-blooded families accumulated more wealth through land and slaves; they "exercised their power in local and

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<sup>76</sup> Robert Molloy, *Charleston, A Gracious Heritage* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1947), v.

national politics, and self-consciously cultivated kinship ties, emotional bonds, and loyalties to each other to promote their shared interests.”<sup>77</sup> After the Civil War, membership in the now impoverished elite class ceased to be about wealth, relying more exclusively on name. Elizabeth O’Neill Verner, a painter and non-elite in Charleston in the early twentieth century, explained that at this time, “the social lines are clearly marked but they are lines of blood and breeding and have nothing to do with bank accounts.”<sup>78</sup> In fact, some elite Charlestonians derived a sense of pride from their lack of economic resources, deeming it proof of their privileged status as many of the elite families of the Low Country lost their fortunes after the Civil War, and in troubled economic times they had difficulty regaining it while remaining a leisured Charleston gentleman or lady.

Charleston’s upper crust was committed to remaining exclusive and powerful through the twentieth century. Their interconnected family, business and cultural ties perpetuated the selectivity and kept the influential names rooted in places of civic and cultural power. South Carolina genealogical historian Lorri Glover observes that “class identity and commitment to protecting class interests ran deeper and [their] control over the city was stronger largely because they enjoyed more extensive and intensive kin connections and greater social cohesion.”<sup>79</sup> One of the class interests that they sought to safeguard and promote was the glory and prominence of their shared history. The old families drew on kinship connections to solidify their power through mutual support and public prominence, through which they derived and exercised influence over civic and cultural matters.<sup>80</sup> Because of their personal connection to and reverence for the past, they had a vested interest in keeping it alive and celebrating relics of the past in Charleston. Anthony Harrigan, in a mid-century article about Charleston, noted the presence of historical manners and patterns of life, observing, “into the life of this Southern city at mid-

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<sup>77</sup> Stephanie E. Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth O’Neill, *Artists Sketchbook*, quoted in Stephanie E. Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>79</sup> Lorri Glover, *All Our Relations: Blood Ties and Emotional Bonds among the Early South Carolina Gentry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), xv.

<sup>80</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 9.

century has been carried a goodly part of the ancient values: the sense of ceremony, the consciousness of duty to lineage, a profound filial regard for the past, and a reluctance to give way to the American drive to destruction of continuity euphemistically termed progress.”<sup>81</sup> Charleston’s white elites continued to follow the social customs and ceremonies of the past, from having “dinner” at three o’clock to the yearly social season culminating in the St. Cecilia Society balls, activities their ancestors had been engaging in since colonial times.<sup>82</sup>

Observers were quick to assert that the aristocracy of Charleston, though sometimes intimidating and certainly rigid, was not high and mighty; rather it showed, by a commitment to hospitality, a warm, welcoming attitude and good manners. An article from 1926 affirms, “Some outlanders smile at what they describe as the ‘aristocraticness’ of Charleston, yet this is merely the dignity and poise and self-respect of a high-class community, as distinguished from the snobbishness which poses as ‘aristocracy’ in many another city. The warm hospitality of Charleston is characteristic of true aristocracy, and is unknown in snobbery.”<sup>83</sup> Thus the aristocratic nature of elite society in Charleston proved to be welcoming, fascinating and a draw for twentieth century tourists, accustomed to characterizations of aristocracy in other cities or countries that were less convivial and approachable. The tourist industry would capitalize on this fascination in the twentieth century, featuring the houses of prominent Charlestonians of the past and present as tourist attractions.

In a country where democratic ambition and social climbing ruled, the persistence of a closed, stable aristocratic-like society in Charleston into the twentieth century captivated traveling middle-class Americans. For early twentieth century tourists, visiting a society with prominent bloodlines was almost like foreign travel. Visitors ignorant of Charleston’s social structure expressed surprise to learn that the names of the streets, the antebellum plantation owners’ names, and the names of the cultural and political elite of the present day were one and the same. An article from 1951 appearing in *Travel Bazaar*

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<sup>81</sup> Anthony Harrigan, “Charleston: The Place and the People” *The American Mercury*, 1954, Pamphlet collection, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

<sup>82</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 8.

<sup>83</sup> “An American City Which Should Be Preserved,” *Manufacturers Record*, 20 May 1926.

magazine revealed to its readers that “the names of Charleston streets—Gaillard, Pinckney, and the rest—are very apt to be the names of leading citizens today.”<sup>84</sup> V.S. Naipaul relates an experience in late-twentieth century Charleston when a tourist, inquiring about the historical families of the old houses in the downtown area, asked a carriage driver, “What are they doing now?” The driver, “living up to his role as the retailer of wonders,” responded that they had not gotten up yet. Naipaul sharply notes that this exchange demonstrates “the little distance that can exist in downtown Charleston between the tourist and the thing toured.”<sup>85</sup> The phenomenon of the prominence of ancient names and lineages persisted in many parts of twentieth century Charleston life. For example, the names of the writers, artists, and cultural activists of the 1920s and 1930s Charleston Renaissance read like a register of the most wealthy and prominent planters of the colonial and antebellum eras. The list of twentieth century mayors and their wives parallels a similar register, with the same names appearing all at once as cultural leaders, civic leaders, and historically prominent families. Memories were long in Charleston and evidenced the interconnectedness of culture, politics, society and history in twentieth century public life.

## **Part II: Charleston’s Old World Flavor and Confronting Possibilities of a New Charleston**

Charleston’s social structure and the persistence of a rooted elite group into the twentieth century demonstrate aspects of Charleston’s nature: glorification of the past, a leisured attitude and attention to ceremony and tradition. Charlestonian DuBose Heyward, author of the novel *Porgy*, observed in 1939 that “Charleston to this day, with colonial life a hundred and fifty years behind it, seems in many respects more British than American. There is a definite resistance to sudden change, and a stubborn clinging to modes of life and thought that have been tried and proved.”<sup>86</sup> One of the aspects that made Charleston appear more British than American was the rigid and prized social structure. The elites of the twentieth century lived in many ways very similarly to those of colonial and antebellum times, and their adherence

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<sup>84</sup> “The Gracious City of Charleston,” *Travel Bazaar Magazine*, March 1951, 251.

<sup>85</sup> V. S. Naipaul, *A Turn in the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 78.

<sup>86</sup> DuBose Heyward, “Where mellow Past and Present Meet,” *National Geographic*, Vol. LXXV, No. 3, March 1939, 277.

to custom and leisure left an impression on visitors. Another aspect that attracted visitors was the city's distinctive pace and appearance. Visiting Charleston allowed people to relax and enjoy a slower paced life than the one they faced at home. Heyward praised Charleston for preserving "through the assaults of a mechanized civilization a mode and manner of life which are an antidote for the jangled nerves of today."<sup>87</sup> Charleston contrasted other contemporary American cities, where industry and modernization marked the atmosphere and inhabitants bustled along. In an article from 1926, the author remarked, "The clean, clear, untarnished atmosphere he [a Charlestonian] accepted as a matter of course, and without comment or, probably thought; to his guest it was striking in contrast with the gloom through which one peers at the skyline and landscape from the roofs of tall buildings in other cities."<sup>88</sup> Charleston's unique aspects and old world flavor imprinted fond memories and prompted desires to preserve its endearing aspects.

When confronted with the possible changes that came with the twentieth century, many tourists and locals lamented the possible loss of old Charleston, and emerged with a new resolve to push preservation and tourism to keep industry and modernization from affecting the traditional flavor. One article in 1968 advocating preserving historical edifices and ambiance proclaimed dolefully, "historic Charleston is being subtly undermined for lack of present day architectural vitality."<sup>89</sup> While official pamphlets could not bemoan twentieth century progress at the expense of the past, they could emphasize its traditional aspects, such as its historical structures and quaint atmosphere. One pamphlet called "Picturesque Charleston" boasted, "Drawing upon a background of more than two and a half centuries of cultural effort, it has much to offer the lovers of the beautiful, in the way of architecture, stately gardens, and finely wrought gateways; while to the student of the historic, the searcher after quiet...or the transient sightseer it gives in measure the thing desired."<sup>90</sup> Importantly, this particular pamphlet, which lists and

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 278 and 281.

<sup>88</sup> "An American City Which Should Be Preserved."

<sup>89</sup> "Charleston—Past and Present," *The Bulletin*, 28 June 1968.

<sup>90</sup> "Picturesque Charleston," Pamphlet, Pamphlet Collection, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

describes popular and historic places to visit, did not talk about or promote new structures, industries or ways of life in Charleston, leaving the tourist to explore exclusively the Charleston of the past.

On the other hand, to some visitors, Charlestonians and writers, the melding of the old and the new did not represent a threat to the prized past; rather, they viewed it as the blending of the best of both worlds and looked forward to the changes of the future and how they would work themselves into Charleston's rich past. An article in the magazine of the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* from 1953 exclaimed, "The past is inseparably mixed with the present in Charleston—where else can you walk smack into the Eighteenth Century on a spring night?"<sup>91</sup> This article echoed the sentiment that in a twentieth century city, the relics of the past remained alive and vital to the city, while emphasizing that the past in Charleston was inextricably linked with the present. A guidebook from 1912 recognized early on the benefits of mixing elements of old and new. The book proclaimed that Charleston was "a city that has retained in the civic life all that was best in the old while reaching for all that is best in the new. Charleston is a city of refining influences, noted everywhere for the hospitality of its people and their courtesy. *Charleston is the city of destiny.*"<sup>92</sup> Early in the twentieth century, observers saw that Charleston could still celebrate and relish in the past while leaving room for progress. In an article published inside a program for the celebration of the centennial of the Civil War the author asserted that the visitor, "wherever he goes, he will find a city that looks to the future with eagerness while keeping a respectful and admiring eye on its fascinating past."<sup>93</sup> Thus some embraced the possibilities of change, seeing it as a chance for the city to take the best of both the old and the new, and make it a better place to live, visit, preserve history and embrace progress.

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<sup>91</sup> "You can walk smack into the 18th century on a spring tour of Charleston" *Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine*, 22 February 1953.

<sup>92</sup> Emphasis from the original. *New Guide Book to Modern Charleston*, (Charleston: Walter, Evans and Cogswell Co., 1912), 1.

<sup>93</sup> A. M. Wilcox, "Charleston...Then and Now," Official Historical Program: "The Charleston Centennial of the Confederate Commemoration 1861-1961," 1961, Centennial Vertical File, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

Whether welcoming or bemoaning changes in Charleston, a new Charleston seemed imminent to both its supporters and critics, and the aspects of this new Charleston could either be its resuscitation or its destruction. Many civic and business leaders, along with outside observers from other parts of the United States saw the changes coming to Charleston with modernization and industry to be good for Charleston's future, and that Charleston could become a "vibrant, forward-looking center, pulsing with industry."<sup>94</sup> A pamphlet produced by the Charleston Chamber of Commerce echoed the idea that change could revitalize the city and that blending its glorious past with its promising future would create a better city than previously imagined. The Chamber of Commerce emphasized, "While preserving intact the cultural, architectural, historic and scenic values, Charleston has gone steadily forward in the development of industrial and commercial opportunities, assuring not only a gracious and pleasant environment in which to visit, but a prosperous and thriving community in which to live."<sup>95</sup> The ameliorations of Charleston that would come with increased economic opportunities would not necessarily add to the tourism industry, but it would improve the city as a place to live, allowing its citizens to engage in greater economic endeavors and prosper. Even early in the twentieth century, leaders cheered on the possibilities of a new Charleston, where the old could unite with the best that the new century had to offer. The *New Guide Book to Modern Charleston*, published in 1912, shows this dialogue between the old and the new and the prospects it offered Charleston's future; the book boasted, "Charleston is a city with the most splendid historic past of any town in the United States, a city, on this account, measuring her activities by the incentive of a glorious yesterday, but ever alive to the opportunity of to-day...completely confident of the golden future that must empty a cornucopia of her [waterfront] piers."<sup>96</sup> By emphasizing the cornucopia of her waterfront piers, the guidebook suggested that the future of Charleston's advancement lay in the prospect of the city as a shipping center.

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<sup>94</sup> Charles Layng, "The Present and Past Blend in Charleston," *New York Times*, 4 February 1968.

<sup>95</sup> "Come to Charleston and the Low Country," Pamphlet produced by Charleston Chamber of Commerce, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

<sup>96</sup> *New Guide Book to Modern Charleston*, 1.

Not all saw the economic possibilities of a new Charleston to be a sure sign of a gleaming future; rather, some lamented the possibility of the destruction of the old Charleston, emphasizing that the old Charleston had to be preserved at all costs. One article about Charleston from 1926 asked “what cares one” about Charleston’s shipping, industrial and transportation innovations, because “the most important point to a true American who has visited Charleston, especially if he has visited many other cities, is that Charleston shall remain Charleston—that the Charleston of the future still shall be the American Charleston, the serene, the contented Charleston—the aristocratic Charleston if you will.”<sup>97</sup> So while some civic and business leaders celebrated the possibilities of a new Charleston, alive to economic and industrial possibilities, other elites and visitors struggled to come to terms with the possibility of progress at the risk of losing what they loved of the old Charleston. Twentieth century Charleston would struggle particularly between the competing interests of industry proper and the industry of history.

### **Part III: A Twentieth Century Match-Up: History vs. Industry in Charleston**

During the twentieth century, Charleston faced change from many different directions: changing attitudes about race and region, a changing political landscape, modern innovations that transformed households and public spaces, and an emphasis on developing industry and other economic advancements. In the face of all these complex changes, industrial development seemed the easiest for Charlestonians to take sides on, either embracing the city’s industrial destiny or resisting the drive to industrialize. Many of those supporting industrialization and port development came from outside the city, or at least outside the ring of elite Charlestonians who pointed to industry’s power to corrupt the historical integrity of their city. Thus through the first three-quarters of the twentieth century, a debate ensued between those encouraging industrial and shipping development as Charleston’s destiny and those emphasizing the damage industrialization would bring to the city.

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<sup>97</sup> “An American City Which Should Be Preserved.”

Supporters of industrial development championed the economic revitalization it would bring to the city, as well as the value Charleston would gain as a contemporary city if it had an active port and industrial area. One writer observed the effort to encourage this change, and the challenges Charleston faced: “Charleston, having made itself a principal Southern tourist city, is now trying to make itself also an important industrial center and principal Atlantic port. National strikes, Government red tape and the scarcity of essential materials have impeded the effort. But the city can count forty-six new industries established here since the movement got under way...”<sup>98</sup> Despite such obstacles then, it is clear that industrialization did occur. Charleston sought economic prosperity and national attention for its vitality as a port and industrial center. And with this came changes among the citizens and their attitudes. One article observed, “With the new-found prosperity...have come striking changes in the human types in the Charleston area and even more profound changes in their economic condition.”<sup>99</sup> Newcomers drawn by economic opportunity may have been another reason for some to view industrialization and economic renewal with suspicion. For an elite group of citizens who took pride not only in their blood lines, but in their very lack of wealth, a new group of prospering immigrants to Charleston that prospered not by history but in industry represented a threat to their way of life.

Literature not produced by civic or promotional bodies began to suggest that industry represented a threat to the Charleston that everybody knew and loved. Many expressed fear and disapproval at the prospect of a new industrial Charleston because of their commitment to the promotion and celebration of history and beauty. An article in *Travel Bazaar* noted this indifference towards industry and modern progress among Charlestonians: “There is in Charleston a large Navy Yard and considerable recent industrial progress; but if you try to learn about such matters from one of the staunch preservers of its past, you will meet polite (a Charlestonian is invariably polite) but impenetrable resistance.”<sup>100</sup> Elite Charlestonians, committed to the city’s and their own personal histories, refused to promote industry,

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<sup>98</sup> Herbert Ravenel Sass, “The Cities of America: Charleston,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 8 February 1947.

<sup>99</sup> Harrigan, “Charleston: The Place and the People.”

<sup>100</sup> “The Gracious city of Charleston,” 251.

pointing to the evils that came with industrialization such as slums, smog and greed. In 1942, the Civic Services Committee, dedicated to preserving architectural integrity in Charleston, arranged a photographic exhibit of contemporary Charleston that depicted “Fine old buildings and narrow, picturesque streets that tourists come miles to see...and also squalid slums, crowded tenements, fire and health hazards. The pictures show architectural achievements that are the pride of America, and the addition of gimcracks that spoil natural values.”<sup>101</sup> By positioning the glories and treasures of Charleston’s historical district next to the damages of modernity and industry, those in charge of this exhibit from the Civic Services Committee (dominated by elite Charlestonians) made a statement about the debate over history and industry, showing the damages of industry on a well-loved city.

In addition to the physical damages that industrialization would bring to a historic city like Charleston, some bewailed the corruption and greed that would infiltrate their city if it became a big economic and industrial, rather than historical and tourist, center. In 1926, a writer commented on the changes in Charleston during an industrial conference taking place in the city:

Overnight a cyclone of activity developed: the air was filled with dollar-signs and the atmosphere was polluted by clouds of swirling dust. The rise and fall of Jerusalem and Venice and Rome and other ‘Mistresses of Trade’ and world centers of wealth came to mind, and fear filled me lest Charleston be tempted to swap the treasure of contentment for the shadow of false riches...What would it profit Charleston to gain such material wealth and lose its clean civic soul?<sup>102</sup>

This writer compares the physical pollution Charleston would face with industry to the moral pollution that would come with the greed and riches of industry. Interestingly enough, this article came from the magazine *Manufacturers Record*, targeted at those involved in trade and manufacturing. Thus, even those with a vested interest in industrial pursuits recognized the detriments of losing historic Charleston to the greed and litter of an industrial city.

Those condemning industry were not encouraging Charleston’s civic and tourist identity to be narrowly historic; rather, they emphasized and encouraged the other aspects Charleston had to offer

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<sup>101</sup> “The Face of a City,” Editorial on a photograph exhibit arranged by the Civic Services Committee, 16 April 1942, Civic Services Committee File, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC.

<sup>102</sup> “An American City Which Should Be Preserved.”

citizens and tourists alike, except for shipping and industry. Highlighting the diversity of activities and aesthetics in town, a writer promoting the celebration of Charleston's Tri-centennial in 1970 suggested that

Charleston is a town of contrasts. History is Charleston's most important product...But the charm of this old port city isn't limited to the Adam architecture of historic homes, the wrought iron fences and balconies...there are also sandy white beaches for swimming...a yacht basin, golf courses, three internationally famous gardens, a naval base, tattoo parlor, plantations, monuments, a museum, art gallery, public park and zoo, and a tree where George Washington tied his horse. Take your pick.<sup>103</sup>

Though there are some enigmas in the list of activities and sites suggested to tourists, this article demonstrates the view that a modernized Charleston, complete with golf courses and a tattoo parlor, was acceptable but industrialized Charleston was not. In a sense, emphasizing the diversity of attractions pushed the case—there was so much good in unindustrialized Charleston, it did not need or want the complications of industry.

#### **Part IV: Preservation—Elite Charleston's Answer to the Encroachment of Modern Times**

With the persistence of mixed feelings over industrial and other modern developments, the preservation movement emerged as a productive way to fight against the intrusion of modern times on Charleston's historic veneer. Preservation was particularly appealing to those who were resistant to change and committed to keeping Charleston's heritage alive; elite Charlestonians saw preservation as their way of safeguarding their ancestral values, physical spaces and way of life.

The preservation movement emerged early on in the twentieth century, just as the debates over the desirability of an industrial cityscape got underway. Ironically, it was the economic revival of the city, attributed to the combined forces of increased tourism and Charleston's industrial endeavors—its port and its naval yard—that allowed for the preservation movement to gain speed and success. The economic resurrection of the city coupled with financial backing from outsiders eager to keep the beautiful and historic aspects of Charleston alive allowed early preservationists to buy, restore and

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<sup>103</sup> Joann Coker Harris, "Charleston Tricentennial," *Ford Times*, April 1970, 2.

preserve a number of old mansions and neighborhoods.<sup>104</sup> Yet elite preservationists would hardly have admitted as much. For them, inspiration sprang solely from the threat of losing historically, architecturally and aesthetically valuable old houses. Historian Robert R. Weyeneth, writing about the work of the Historic Charleston Foundation created in 1947, notes that “as in so many other cities, the first stirrings of the preservation impulse were stimulated by the destruction—or threatened destruction—of landmark buildings, structures closely linked with community history whose presence on the cityscape often fostered a sense of civic identity for residents.”<sup>105</sup> Thus those elite Charlestonians proud of their ancestors’ achievements and the remnants of those achievements in the twentieth century created a number of preservationist groups in the first half of the twentieth century. The most prominent were the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings, founded in 1920, and the Historic Charleston Foundation.<sup>106</sup> Preservationists vehemently stressed the value of the old and the fakeness and brevity of the modern. Thus the preservation movement emerged from the social milieu of blue-blooded white Charlestonians keen to protect their heritage and its physical representations.

Preservationists themselves maintained that they did not want to completely block the evolution of Charleston as a modern, commercial city; rather, they wanted to make the modern compatible with the past. Susan Pringle Frost, the founder of the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings and one of the foremost preservationists of the time, wrote in a letter to the editor of the *News & Courier* in 1928 emphasizing the fact that she and other preservationists did not want to destroy the possibilities for progress. She wrote, “I want to bring out the fact that members of our Society are not opposed to progress, that we would like to see industries, smoke stacks, and everything that would advance Charleston commercially, come once more to Charleston; but we want them properly located, and not at the expense of the beauty and charm of Charleston’s distinctiveness, which annually brings so many

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<sup>104</sup> “Charleston—Past and Present.”

<sup>105</sup> Robert Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>106</sup> See Chapter 1 for more detailed information about the goals and founding of these preservationist organizations

visitors to its doors.”<sup>107</sup> Historian Stephanie Yuhl emphasizes this aspiration, observing that “preservationists sought to control the types of commercial endeavor allowed in their city, not to thwart them altogether or to return blindfolded to a past ‘golden age.’”<sup>108</sup> The fact that the preservationists themselves asserted their commitment to allowing the intermingling of the old and new in Charleston demonstrates that they at least recognized the need to embrace some elements of progress to keep both their movement and the city alive.

Despite the claims that the old and new could coexist in Charleston, and that preservationists did not want to abolish the opportunity for progress, much of the evidence points to the fact that many did indeed want to forego progress to wholly preserve the history and culture of the city. Observers of Charleston noted its commitment to the past in both derisive and reverent terms. One writer observing Southern towns in 1917 stated, “Charleston is perhaps the only city in America that has slammed its front door in Progress’s face and resisted the modern with fiery determination.”<sup>109</sup> This writer clearly disapproved of the vehemence of Charleston’s early stirrings of preservation tendencies, as the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings had not even been established when this writer made this observation. However, others praised Charleston’s rejection of modern developments, describing it as a welcome return to a past that so many had forsaken. One article extolled, “It is not only that Charleston is prodigiously rich in historical experiences from earliest Colonial days, but it has preserved the traditions and the true spirit of early America through all the changes and chances of our restless American life.”<sup>110</sup> Whether the renunciation of the new in favor of the old was intentional or not, or even applicable to Charleston, it was clear that the preservation movement promoted the commemoration and conservation of the past in discriminating terms, and “a highly selective historical memory that is best described as personal, romantic, and heroic.”<sup>111</sup> And many times, there was hardly any room for aspects of modern

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<sup>107</sup> Susan Pringle Frost, “Letter to the Editor,” (*Charleston*) *News & Courier*, 11 May 1928.

<sup>108</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 27.

<sup>109</sup> Mildred Cram, *Old Seaport Towns of the South* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1917), 125.

<sup>110</sup> “An American City Which Should Be Preserved.”

<sup>111</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 20.

city life in the romantic and heroic creation of Charleston's history. Not only did Charleston struggle to reconcile industry and preservation, but it also struggled to merge the needs and desires of a modern traveling public with the historical identity and backdrop so prized.

### **Part V: Uniting Modern Comforts with the Integrity of the Past**

Visitors praised the preservation movement, intrigued by the prospect of seeing an untainted historical city; yet, modern tourists were also unwilling to sacrifice their comfort and modern amenities in their visit to Charleston. The tourist industry had to find a way to reconcile the authenticity of the past with the drive for modernization pushed by twentieth century tourists. Integration of the two elements was vital, as even with the rise of industry in Charleston, it still relied heavily on the booming tourist industry. There was a sense of urgency in creating an "authentic" yet comfortable atmosphere in the picturesque city, because "if Charleston didn't keep herself as quaintly attractive as she could, she would lose her life's blood—the tourist money."<sup>112</sup> Charleston's tourism industry was plagued by this struggle between the demands of modern travelers for well-appointed facilities, commerce and transportation and the quest to recreate and uphold an impression of the past as very much alive. One guidebook touted Charleston's "old world atmosphere and romantic charm amidst up-to-date surroundings and modern conveniences."<sup>113</sup> The problem presented itself when the modernizations detracted from the authenticity and charisma of the city; elite Charlestonians recognized the potential for this detraction and some passionately debated the suitability of various modern conveniences. Though, as Stephanie Yuhl observes, "in the end, both preservation and its 'modernized' infrastructure endured, as hundreds of thousands of tourists from all over the country journeyed to the Low Country...to experience the Charleston mystique in comfort and convenience," the "modernized infrastructure" did not go unchallenged in the elite community.<sup>114</sup> Charleston's blue-bloods debated changes in carriages in

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<sup>112</sup> Edward Twig, "Charleston: The Great Myth," *Forum and Century*, Vol. CIII, No. 1, January 1940, 4.

<sup>113</sup> "Romantic Charleston" (Charleston S.C.: Elliman, Huyler & Mullaly, Inc).

<sup>114</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 171.

Charleston, the upkeep and advertising on its roads, and modernization in hotels and transportation. The vehemence with which they debated some of the smaller, some frankly sillier, changes further illustrates their resistance to change and desire to preserve their own aristocratic heritage.

*Carriage Riding: Stepping into the Past But How to Avoid Stepping in...*

Carriages were reintroduced into Charleston's tourism industry in the 1940s significantly after they vanished with the introduction of automobiles. They embodied all that was old-fashioned and romantic about Charleston, and allowed visitors to ride around the streets much as those during colonial and antebellum times would have.<sup>115</sup> In a magazine produced by automobile manufacturer Plymouth, the writer praised carriage use in Charleston saying, "Honeymooners favor the carriages as the best means for getting around the compact old city. So do touring families, and we saw silver-haired couples climbing into the conveyances for a smiling ride for old time's sake."<sup>116</sup> Both practical for navigating busy and narrow cobblestone streets and engaging for visitors, carriages presented visitors with another view of the city and added to the ambiance of Charleston's cobblestone streets.

The revival of carriages in Charleston can be attributed to two elite Charlestonians, who formed Carriage Tours, Inc. for both practical, amusement and commemoration purposes. Other cities that added a carriage tour service to their tourist offerings, such as Williamsburg, Virginia and New York City, benefited both economically and aesthetically by the added quaintness. Additionally, children would have the chance to gain an experience their ancestors would have enjoyed.<sup>117</sup> This argument that for local children carriages instilled a sense of pride and intrigue about their own pasts reinforced Charlestonians' civic dignity and desire for commemoration. The drivers themselves also took much pride in the grandiosity with which they drove their carriages and presented their passengers to the world. The *Plymouth Traveler* magazine observed that "only in Charleston do people appreciate the difference

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<sup>115</sup> This is a whole other issue—visitors "doing the Charleston" or trying to act like Charleston residents of the past and present is covered in Chapter 3.

<sup>116</sup> Plymouth traveler, "City of Romance"

<sup>117</sup> "Carriages Roll Here Once Again," *Charleston Evening Post*, 9 December 1949.

between a man who drives with style and one who drives as if he is behind brewery horses.”<sup>118</sup> Through the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, drivers of carriages remained mostly black. They were both experienced in their profession, some having driven carriages for elite Charlestonians at the turn of the century, and proud of their prominence.<sup>119</sup>

Debate arose over the resurrection of carriages in Charleston not because of the threat of the carriages themselves to historical ambiance, because they quickly became a key example of the authenticity and historical charm of the city; rather, debate arose over the desirability of controlling the horse manure on twentieth century Charleston streets. With the revival of carriages for tourist purposes, some pedestrians found the streets flooded with carriages, horses and the horses’ natural byproduct. While road apples may have been authentic, they were not particularly quaint. Pretty soon, some began calling for a way to control the accumulation of horse manure on the streets; the proposed solution was diapers affixed to the horses to keep the streets clean. Ironically enough, many elite Charlestonians opposed this proposal, favoring keeping the horses un-diapered, allowing the streets to be in authentic pre-modern (and therefore pre-horse diaper) condition. Those most attuned to the desire of tourists to avoid stepping in horse manure during a leisurely stroll advocated diapering the horses. The debate that ensued was lively, and for a period of a few months in the early 1950s, the *News & Courier* reported almost daily whether the diapers were on or whether they had been taken off to appease the city’s elites.<sup>120</sup> After many months of back and forth, evaluating the pros and cons of diapering the carriage-drawing horses, the final decision was made to diaper the horses. In essence, this was a triumph for those promoting tourism, with their concern for tourists’ comforts and desire for a modern sanitary environment, over the city’s heritage and authenticity conscious elites. The tenacity with which elite

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<sup>118</sup> “City of Romance,” *Plymouth Traveler*, November 1962, 10.

<sup>119</sup> “Like Going Back Into the Past,” (*Charleston*) *News & Courier*, 11 November 1949. See Figure 10 in the Image Appendix for a picture of a black carriage driver and tourists in Charleston.

<sup>120</sup> All of this information comes from a series of newspaper clippings in the Charleston County Public Library Tourism Vertical File, from the (*Charleston*) *News & Courier*, 1950

Charlestonians wanted to embrace the truly authentic emphasizes their commitment to a vision of old world “charm,” even when the “charm” threatened both their shoes and noses.

### *Improving Road Surfaces and Routing*

One persistent problem facing Charleston tourism throughout the twentieth century was its location far from the routes of major tourist highways. Tourists to easily bypassed Charleston on their drive down the East Coast. The few road entrances to the city and its surrounding area were in poor condition, a sorry welcome for tourists. A traveler in 1923 wrote, “we had sundry interesting adventures along the way—such as getting stuck in a mud-hole in the middle of an eerie swamp after dark—the most terrific southern road surface!”<sup>121</sup> An experience such as this would not have given a visitor to Charleston a very good first impression. Although their experiences in visiting Charleston would often make up for the difficulty of getting to it, city leaders and others recognized the need to remedy this problem to improve their tourist trade. The City Yearbooks from the years of 1920 through 1951 frequently mentioned efforts to advertise Charleston along tourist routes, and to avoid the re-numbering and diversion of already existing routes which would have created confusion for tourists seeking Charleston. City and civic leaders often compared Charleston with Florida, aspiring to attract the same sort of tourist traffic and admiring Floridians’ efforts to increase tourism through road signs and easily accessible highway routes. In the *News & Courier* in 1952, an article noted, “On a Florida highway one sees for miles signs advertising Florida’s oldest oak tree. Along with our world-famed gardens, our historic houses and our historic shrines, we must develop and promote our many other attractions, in order that the appeal of Charleston may be broadened to draw a larger segment of the traveling public.”<sup>122</sup> Charleston wanted to draw not only history buffs from the inland southern highway routes, but also those interested in other activities that Charleston had to offer. Thus Charleston endeavored to modernize its road surfaces, the advertising on the routes of its environs, its highway accessibility and the ease of driving and parking within the city.

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<sup>121</sup> “Letter to Mrs. Farmer,” 10 April 1923, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

<sup>122</sup> “Charleston and the Tourism Industry” (*Charleston) News and Courier*, 7 December 1952.

Recognizing the importance of automobiles and therefore the quality and accessibility of roads was the first step for Charleston toward embracing the modernization that came with cars. The next step was for the city and civic leaders to act to make changes to make driving to, in and around Charleston easier and more enjoyable. To remedy the city's advertising and highway problems, the city put up highway signs and fought against roads being re-routed away from Charleston. The City Yearbook reported the beginning of their fight for the highways in 1930, saying "Charleston, in the past few years has made wonderful strides in the development of its highway connections, contributing heavily toward the road and bridge building program of the county and throwing its weight to those movements which have stood for the advancement of connecting new highway systems."<sup>123</sup> The Yearbooks also periodically mentioned actions taken to advertise along the highway, for example, the 1932-5 Yearbook mentioned paying \$850 for a sign advertising the Ocean Highway Route, a route that led travelers straight to Charleston.<sup>124</sup> And all of their work paid off slowly. As the 1949-51 Yearbook asserted, "New highway signs have been erected which have proven to be the most effective in getting the traveling public to drive the road to Charleston."<sup>125</sup> Yet getting visitors to Charleston via their highways was only half of the city's challenges with the roads.

Once the visitors were in Charleston, alerting them to traffic laws, accommodating their parking, and acclimating them to the city's cobblestone streets all needed to be addressed. The Chamber of Commerce came up with a card that it placed on the windows of cars in the tourist district and at the Visitor Welcome Center. The card, which greeted the travelers with the words "A Friendly Hello and Howdy Do, Mr. Stranger," served to control the tourists' use of automobiles in downtown Charleston, which was not fully modernized for heavy automobile traffic.<sup>126</sup> The cards alerted drivers to the city's traffic rules, allowed them street parking, and threw in some suggestions of things to see and historical

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<sup>123</sup> "Mayor Stoney's Annual Review," *Year Book, City of Charleston* (1930), xii.

<sup>124</sup> "Mayor Maybank's Report," *Year Book, City of Charleston* (1932-1935), 17.

<sup>125</sup> "Office of Public Relations Report," *Year Book, City of Charleston* (1949-1951), 334.

<sup>126</sup> "A Friendly Hello and Howdy Do, Mr. Stranger," Card published by the Chamber of Commerce Information Bureaus, "Tourism" Vertical File, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC. See Figure 11 in the Image Appendix for the front part of this card.

facts. For some, driving in downtown encompassed all that was good about the city—the good manners drivers exhibited toward one another, and the laid-back attitude of the city’s inhabitants. As one writer described arriving in Charleston and driving to the hotel, saying “And the spirit of the city and its people is indicated in the drive. No wild rush for the ‘right of way’ is evident at street intersections, but each driver politely shows his willingness to defer to the other.”<sup>127</sup> So even if the city’s leisurely attitude towards driving did not accommodate modern aggressive drivers, it embodied the character of the city, introducing visitors to the fact that though it made concessions to modernity, Charleston would still greet them with an old-world, relaxed attitude.

*Getting there and Staying there: Transportation and Hotels*

For the first few decades of the twentieth century, Charleston struggled to meet the demands of the new traveling public in their rail and air facilities. In 1925, Mayor Stoney implored, “...so far no new passenger station has been started in the City of Charleston. We want tourists. They are passing by our doors by the hundreds with each fast train of the Coast line going through seven miles beyond the City limits.”<sup>128</sup> Tourists were unlikely to stop casually in Charleston on their way down south if the train station was so isolated from the attractions of the city. Even tourists planning on staying in Charleston would have to go through the trouble of hiring a car to take them into town, rather than being dropped off in the heart of the city, like New York and Washington D.C.<sup>129</sup> Air travel partially remedied the city’s accessibility, and with the commercialization and mass-utilization of air travel, the city became more appealing as “new low fares, round trip and charters are added inducement for air travel to and through Charleston.”<sup>130</sup> Modernized transportation facilities aided the city’s tourist trade, though the city struggled to stay on par with other cities in terms of ease of transportation.

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<sup>127</sup> “An American City Which Should Be Preserved.”

<sup>128</sup> “Mayor Stoney’s Annual Review,” *Year Book, City of Charleston* (1925), xlvii.

<sup>129</sup> Even today, though the new train station is within city limits, it is still very remote from the downtown area, and is rather desolate looking.

<sup>130</sup> “Charleston May See Record Tourist Year,” (*Charleston*) *News & Courier*, 29 January 1950.

Arousing the desire in potential tourists to come to Charleston was only half the battle. After tourists braved the complicated highway routes, poor roads, and paucity of alternative means of transportation, the city strived to present them with a place to stay that was both comfortably modern and charmingly authentic. The modernization of hotels, unlike transportation, presented fewer difficulties. The increasing stream of guests necessitated refurbishment of old hotels and construction of new ones and this boosted the local economy. DuBose Heyward commented on the progress in 1939, “With its subtropical climate, and ranking high in hours of sunshine, Charleston’s tourist traffic has been building steadily until it has become an economic ‘back log’ against evil days. Housing accommodations...have been pushing forward to keep abreast of the seasonal increase in population.”<sup>131</sup> Key for Charleston’s tourism boom was being able to house visitors in comfort, with modern amenities, but keeping the historical ambiance and hospitality.

In the 1920s, two new large luxury hotels opened, touting modern conveniences in a historical and picturesque setting. The Francis Marion Hotel, named after a local Revolutionary War hero, had modern ventilation and lighting, and advertised itself as “a Modern Hotel in an Atmosphere of Tradition.”<sup>132</sup> The other new hotel, located right on the historic Battery looking out onto the water and Fort Sumter, was called The Fort Sumter Hotel to emphasize its location in the heart of the historic district.<sup>133</sup> Visitors to the Fort Sumter Hotel could sit in the rooftop garden and admire the view of the real Fort Sumter, or leave their updated rooms for a stroll through colonial streets right outside the doors of the hotel.

There was never a lack of hotels in Charleston, and even if not fully modernized, the southern hospitality that greeted guests smoothed their stay. Visitors enjoyed the assurance that, “go where one will, he will be welcomed as the guest of honor par excellence, and above all will be made to feel ‘at

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<sup>131</sup> Heyward, “Where Mellow Past and Present Meet,” 304.

<sup>132</sup> “The Story of the Bridge” Pamphlet published by the Francis Marion Hotel, 8 August 1929, Robert Scott Small Library, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

<sup>133</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 164.

home.”<sup>134</sup> In fact, though visitors demanded the conveniences of modern hotels in a modernizing city, they often became irritated with them at night, such as the noise made by a conveniently located taxi stand outside the hotel. During the day they demanded accessibility to this taxi stand, but it irritated them after a long day of sightseeing. Still, the hotel business was a relatively uncontroversial place for modernization, as the modern amenities within the hotel did not offend the city’s elites, nor did they impinge upon their appreciation of their galvanized past. Thus, the modernization of hotels, and to a lesser extent transportation facilities, successfully met the needs of the tourist industry.

*In the End: Differing Opinions over Civic Matters*

Whether civic issues were hotly and humorously debated, like the issue over horse-diapering, or quietly accepted, like the modernization of hotels, the twentieth century forced elite Charlestonians clinging to the relics of the past to confront the possibility of change in different arenas. Some approved of the changes, mostly because of the advantages they presented to the traveling public that was the lifeblood of Charleston’s economy. Mayor Stoney saw change not as an option, but as an un-debatable necessity, saying, “if we are to hope for the tourists’ business, we must have the facilities that other cities have, or suffer as a result of the lack of them.”<sup>135</sup> The city’s officials pushed so strongly for the modern amenities alongside the image as an old-fashioned city, the public impression was that “Charleston became a place where ancient traditions and modern efficiency coexisted peacefully; where a tourist could journey through time without having to sacrifice modern comforts.”<sup>136</sup> Others saw the disadvantages of modernization, and the problems of having debates over small civic matters. One commentator worried that, “the changes have taken some of the so-called ‘color’ out of the city.”<sup>137</sup> It was difficult to retain the image of a charming colonial city when state-of-the-art bridges spanned its waters, smokestacks of industry blurred its horizons and tourists’ automobiles and horse waste cluttered its cobblestone streets. Even discussions of changes often proved more difficult because of the factions

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<sup>134</sup> “An American City Which Should Be Preserved.”

<sup>135</sup> “Mayor Stoney’s Annual Review,” *Year Book, City of Charleston* (1925), xlvii.

<sup>136</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 188

<sup>137</sup> Twig, “Charleston: The Great Myth,” 5.

among the elites and the city officials, as Charlestonian Herbert Ravenel Sass observed, “Charleston people too often split into cliques which neutralize each other, thus defeating new civic ideas—a plan for solving the city’s parking problem is a recent example.”<sup>138</sup> Competition between the city’s blue-blooded cultural leaders and the sometimes common-stock officials became a problem, ensuring Charleston was slow to embrace change in even the most uncontroversial venues. Both groups honored history, but the city government and business leaders pushed for economic sustainability and success, even when the possibility existed of compromising the integrity of the past.

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<sup>138</sup> Sass, “The Cities of America.”

## Chapter 3

### Charleston's Second Yankee Invasion

Starting in 1861, Charlestonians coped with the intrusion of multitudes of Northerners, encroaching on their traditional way of life, first in the blockade and then the bombardment of the city in the Civil War, and then in the occupation of the city during Reconstruction. Proud Charlestonians, accustomed to their own way of life and self-government, found it challenging to keep their identity and distinctiveness in a time when their authority and influence were being questioned. In the twentieth century, Charlestonians tackled the job of preserving their character and social hierarchy in the face of a new group of invaders—Northern tourists who came to marvel in Charleston's old-world charm and social character. Middle-class tourists, measuring their personal success economically rather than by their heritage, were fascinated by the class stratification in Charleston and its relation to the past. In Charleston, the past was alive, not only in the attractions and tours, but in the comportment of the city's social elite.

Tourists envied elite Charlestonians, some even attempting to enter into their social stratum, but the city and its residents was in reality the poorer of the two groups, needing the visitor dollars just as much as the visitors desired a certain representation of the past. How the city's elites lured tourists to the Charleston they created, whether knowingly or not, and the impression these tourists formed as a result of their visit demonstrate the negotiations between producers and consumers of tourism in Charleston. As the multitude of Northerners congregated to revere Charleston's beauty and past, Charlestonians struggled to correlate their desire to be hospitable with their discomfort and sometimes even outright disdain for the visitors' presence, contemptuous of the second invasion of Yankees in their sacred city.

## Part I: Tourists Doing the Charleston

Visitors to Charleston hailed from all over the country and in the later decades of the twentieth century from all over the world, bringing different values and attitudes to the insular Low-Country world. The attitudes and actions of the visitors demonstrate their growing fascination with the Charleston world and as the twentieth century progressed, visitors would flock to the city to “do the Charleston” or experience its routine and lifestyle. What motivated certain types of people to visit Charleston shed light on the tourism development and the interaction between the tourists and the elite community who greeted them with sometimes false smiles. In the earlier part of the twentieth century, visitors had to undergo long journeys to get from points north and west to Charleston, voyaging by rail, ferry and bus for days. A trip undertaken by George C. Bliss of Lynn, Massachusetts in 1941 required four different railroad journeys, a ferry and a bus trip amounting to roughly three days of travel. The journeys were arduous and frequently unpleasant; however, as Mr. Bliss comments, “the beautiful and interesting city of Charleston and the lovely gardens more than made up for any annoyances-so why complain?”<sup>139</sup>

Traveling with others added to the stress of a long journey. Travelers interested in seeing Charleston’s gardens and historic monuments often signed up for guided tours leaving from places like Norfolk, VA, where a group of strangers would gather for a few days of vacation conducted through a travel office or tour group. Tourists arriving as part of a group would have the benefit of guided tours, and the varied knowledge of the diverse group members; but they would also have the added annoyance of the different foibles of strangers and the awkwardness of trying to sustain contact with new acquaintances. Mr. Bliss describes the company on his journey saying, “altho[ugh] we were introduced it was difficult for me to remember who was who. It is rather hard for me to get acquainted. Most of the party are women or are paired off; there is little opportunity on a long bus ride to mingle; when we stop at a hotel, the gang separates, goes to their rooms to rest or out to shop and a shy old gent is more or less out

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<sup>139</sup> George C. Bliss, “Garden Tour Scrapbook,” 1941, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

of it at first.”<sup>140</sup> Despite the discomfort that arose for some amidst strangers in a new setting, the group tours arranged through travel offices often allowed unlikely travelers to experience the highlights of Charleston, giving them a glimpse of the beauty and historic significance of the city. The *New York Journal-American* magazine noted in 1953 that “spring travelers who want to visit these famed garden areas at a minimum expense may take an all-expense tour offered by Trailways Bus Tours, operating out of New York.”<sup>141</sup> Bus tours minimized costs, allowing more middle-class tourists to experience Charleston, a previously cost-prohibitive tourist destination.

With the mass commercialization of travel and the adoption of automobiles as vacation tools, Charleston became a popular stop for families or individuals making a tour of the South via automobile. In 1956, the Charleston newspaper the *News & Courier* describes a family of tourists from Chicago enjoying a few days in Charleston while on a leisurely month’s vacation. This particular group had chosen a car with seats that convert into beds, so that “while one drives, the other rests—just the remedy they say, for tired feet after busy sight-seeing days.”<sup>142</sup> Often, road signs that producers of tourism fought so hard to erect in their attempts to modernize the tourism industry in Charleston would draw these automobile tourists into Charleston for a glimpse of the city. The Office of Public Relations of the city notes in a report in the Yearbook from 1949-1951 that “New highway signs have been erected which have proven to be most effective in getting the traveling public to drive the road to Charleston.”<sup>143</sup> The challenge for Charleston’s tourism organizations was to get these tourists just stopping by on a whim to stay for a number of days, pumping money into Charleston’s drained economy. They emphasized the various activities available to tourists in Charleston—its beaches, shopping and cultural pastimes; however, this was sometimes futile, as “regardless of the available golf, beach and sailing outings, ‘history,’ as packaged by Charleston’s elite white civic and cultural leaders, was the main commodity of

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> “Bus Tours to Historic Gardens Set,” *New York Journal-American*, 21 March 1954, 29(L).

<sup>142</sup> Doris Meadowcroft, *News & Courier(Charleston)*, “Chicagoans Find Russell House Fascinating on Charleston Tour,” 16 July 1956.

<sup>143</sup> “Office of Public Relations Report,” *Year Book, City of Charleston (1949-1951)*, 334.

the trip.”<sup>144</sup> Historic sites, breathtaking cityscapes, and gracious gardens left impressions in tourists’ minds rather than the golf courses, and these classic historic and aesthetic elements could only be enjoyed for a fixed amount of time before they became monotonous as tourists left ephemerally beautiful Charleston for more action-filled attractions elsewhere. But despite the short trips, the beauty left a favorable impression. A young traveler suggested as much in a letter to their mother in New York in 1923 saying, “My but I’m glad I came down here. I wouldn’t have had any idea of the real beauty and charm of South Carolina if I hadn’t.”<sup>145</sup> This young traveler, stopping by Charleston for a couple days’ sojourn, was not attracted to Charleston for its leisure activities; rather they came for and left with an impression of its exceptional charm.

The multitude of gardens, historical homes and picturesque street settings contributed to the idea of the “real beauty and charm” noted by the young traveler. Both official tour itineraries and the unofficial activities of individual tourists often included many of the same sites. Typical tours of Charleston, like one advertised a brochure sent to Mr. Bliss, included a sightseeing tour of the historic downtown district with its historic mansions, churches and civic buildings, visits to Magnolia and Middleton plantations, and time to explore the side streets and peek through gates at private gardens.<sup>146</sup> The historic district tour and visits to the gardens of at least one plantation were considered essential for a visit to Charleston. The Gray Line Bus Company, a large bus company specializing in tours all around the country, advertised that “To make it possible for tourists to see the real treasures of Charleston and its rich surroundings, the Gray Line has arranged convenient tours to the points of greatest interest...Only through these tours can one see Charleston at its best—and everyone should include at least two in their

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<sup>144</sup> Stephanie E. Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 175.

<sup>145</sup> “Letter to Mrs. Farmer,” 10 April 1923, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC. The gender of this letter-writer cannot be determined for certain because no direct reference to their name exists. The letter is signed “Ever so much love from your only child,” giving no hint to the gender or name of the writer. However, I suspect from the nature of the content of the entire letter that the writer is female, but cannot ascertain this for sure.

<sup>146</sup> “Charleston, SC Garden Tour,” Pamphlet, “George C. Bliss Garden Tour Scrapbook,” 1941, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

itinerary: one through Historic Charleston, at least one to the world-famed and colorful gardens.”<sup>147</sup>

These “essentials” of a Charleston trip allowed visitors to see the elements of the city that endeared it as romantic and charming.

Yet there was much more to explore in Charleston than just the typical one or two day tour of the historic district and gardens could offer. A *New York Times* article from 1949 suggested that “besides seeing old houses and azalea gardens, visitors can drive over roads bordered by oak trees festooned with moss, bask in the sun on the Battery, visit Fort Sumter, where the first shots of the Civil War were fired, and relax on some of the finest strands along the Atlantic seaboard.”<sup>148</sup> It did not occur to many travelers to visit both Charleston’s historic district and its beaches, as many thought of Charleston as either a beach resort or a historic and scenic city; the two elements did not often enter into the itinerary of a single tourist together. Charleston’s beaches were largely privatized, with few large tourist resorts capitalizing on tourists looking for just a day in the sun.<sup>149</sup> Shopping was another major pastime for tourists, giving life to Charleston’s downtown shopping district. Shopping and history were not always separate activities, as tourists bought up pieces of the past through purchasing some of the many antiques the city had to offer. As Charleston faced troubling economic times, antique shops flourished on the acquisition of family heirlooms that were distributed all over the country as keepsakes from a historic trip to Charleston.<sup>150</sup>

The acquisition of historical mementos through antiquing demonstrates the tourists’ desire to acquire behind-the-scenes knowledge of Charleston. As Dean MacCannell suggested in his book *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, tourists seek to enter “back regions of tourist attractions for a privileged view of the lives of the “natives.”<sup>151</sup> Tourists in Charleston endeavored to do precisely this—they desired a unique view of the lives of elite residents, through seeing the inside of their houses and

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<sup>147</sup> “Historic Charleston, SC: A Condensed Guide with Map,” Pamphlet produced by the Gray Line Bus Company, “George C. Bliss Garden Tour Scrapbook,” 1941, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston SC. See Figure 12 in the Image Appendix for part of this pamphlet.

<sup>148</sup> Thomas R. Waring, “Charleston Americana,” *New York Times*, 6 March 1949.

<sup>149</sup> “Text of Ruder & Finn Report,” (*Charleston*) *News & Courier*, 30 May-1 June 1967.

<sup>150</sup> Betty Pugh, “Antiquing’ is Major Passtime for Tourists,” (*Charleston*) *News & Courier*, 2 April 1953.

<sup>151</sup> Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976, 94-101. Or see Chapter 1, Part II.

gardens, touching their antiques and passing through their everyday existence as an advantaged viewer. One journalist exploring the world of private guides in Charleston noted that “No tour is complete without a bit of walking and ‘peeking’ into a few private gardens and patios in the lower part of the city. Not infrequently the owner of an attractive home will recognize the guide and invite the group to see the inside of the house, thus providing a bonus.”<sup>152</sup> Thus the private guides served as a sort of entrance ticket for tourists into the “back regions” they desired to see. Seeing the outside of the houses was nice, but people wanted to peek into the private lives of the people living in them—especially an old-fashioned pseudo-aristocratic elite. Teenagers visiting from California were reported to be “delighted with the pretty pastel colors, the old brick walls, the white painted piazzas, but they would like to see inside more houses.”<sup>153</sup> These teenagers were not expressing a discontent with anything they saw, they appreciated the external beauty of Charleston’s house facades; however, they yearned to enter the world of the inhabitants of the pastel houses, seeing how the interior of such a lovely exterior functioned.

This desire to see the insides of houses, or enter the “back regions” of Charleston’s tourist offerings inspired a project undertaken by the Historic Charleston Foundation in 1948 to open a number of the city’s privately held homes for public tours every spring. In a press release about the 1950 tour season, the News Bureau of the Chamber of Commerce says that “of the visitors who come to Charleston and linger to enjoy its historic treasures, patios, and court yards, fascinating antique shops, world-famous gardens...none enjoys a better view than those who come to enjoy the quiet old-world charm found in the magnificent old private homes open to the public from March 20 to April 15. Charleston...once reluctant to forego its privacy, extends more of a welcome to our visitors.”<sup>154</sup> Thus the Chamber of Commerce and the Historic Charleston Foundation both recognized the profitability of conducting tourists on exclusive tours of previously unavailable private spaces. The house tours were hugely successful with tourists, and

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<sup>152</sup> Julian Metz, “Charleston Guide Service: The Unusual is Usual” *Sandlapper Magazine*, January 1969, 32-33.

<sup>153</sup> Doris Meadowcroft, “Teen-Aged California Visitors Delighted By Local Architecture”, (*Charleston*) *News and Courier*, July 1956.

<sup>154</sup> “Press Release,” News Bureau of Chamber of Commerce Press Release, 9 March 1950, Scrapbook 1949-1952, Historic Charleston Archives, Charleston SC.

this same press release continued by noting that the previous year's tours had attendance of several thousand guests hailing from forty-four different states. Many came to Charleston "expressly to see these famous houses."<sup>155</sup>

The unique experience of viewing a home's interior drew Northern tourists hoping to glimpse the "true lives" of Charleston's famous and aristocratic families. The *New York Times* told its readers that "for years shuttered against the outside world and seen only by friends and relatives of the owners, these Charleston dwellings are to be included in a series of tours..."<sup>156</sup> Northern tourists were ecstatic to see the world from which they had previously been barred. Visitors got to touch the owners' furniture, stroll through their gardens and gape at the architectural features of the historical homes. They were reassured that they were in private homes, not museums, giving them a feeling of privilege and insider-status. The *Charleston News & Courier* reports visitors as repeating "It looks so lived in" as they were conducted through the houses, amazed at the blend of history and informality in the private Charleston homes.<sup>157</sup>

News of the unique tours traveled quickly and easily through the country, spread by articles in regional newspapers and national magazines. Tourists, informed by these articles, flocked to Charleston to view the private homes—with 3,287 attending the tours in 1948, the first year, and then 4,500 in 1953.<sup>158</sup> The Tours Director for the Historic Charleston Foundation in 1953 commented, "To me the significant thing about the Tours is the steady and at times dramatic yearly increase in attendance and profits. And of course the other significant thing is the great kindness, generosity and patience of the many home owners who, each year at great personal inconvenience, make the Tours possible."<sup>159</sup> The

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Waring, "Charleston Americana."

<sup>157</sup> Betty Pugh, "Tourists Pay Tribute to Homes on Tour," *News & Courier (Charleston)*, 17 March 1954.

<sup>158</sup> "Annual Report," Annual Report of Tours Director, 1949, Board of Trustees Minutes 1949, and "Historic Charleston Foundation Tours Director's Report," 1953, Board of Trustees Minutes, 1953-1954, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston SC.

<sup>159</sup> "Historic Charleston Foundation Tours Director's Report," 1953, Board of Trustees Minutes, 1953-4, Historic Charleston Foundation, Charleston SC.

tourists themselves were in no ways unappreciative of the great hospitality and generosity their hosts showed in allowing them to view “how the other half lives.”<sup>160</sup>

The other half that these tourists were allowed to observe were not their economic betters—for the tourists to Charleston were by no means poor. In fact they were often more affluent than the sometimes hard-up Charleston elites. Rather, the tourists got to experience how the historically-rooted elites of Charleston lived. Tourists were fascinated by the elite society, their reverence of the past and the Old South hospitality the Charlestonians exhibited, and relished in the opportunity to enter the “back regions” of this city’s social elite.

Both the officially promoted tours, accessed through tourism offices and group tours, and the entrance to the “back regions” enhanced the tourists’ view of Charleston, making them feel as though they were getting the “whole package.” Many tourists emerged from a visit to Charleston with similar impressions: a town resplendent with old-world charm, practically bleeding history and noblesse. In vocalizing their attraction and admiration for the city, many emphasized the charisma of the city and its elite nature as captivating features. In the twentieth century, relics of the past and old social orders had disappeared from the lives of many urban middle-class Northerners. Visiting a city with a marked and involved social elite allowed them to experience yet another aspect of history and nostalgia beyond the physical sites of Charleston. These twentieth century tourists encountered the elite version of an American story, emphasizing pleasant reminiscence for the past; unlike the Yankees of the nineteenth century, this new “army” of visitors “came not to plunder, but to revere.”<sup>161</sup>

## **Part II: Charmed by an Idealized Past**

Revere they did. For the most part, tourists left Charleston with quaint pictures in their minds and nostalgia for a past they had never known. As much as tourism organizations promoted Charleston’s role in colonial history and its military monuments, the impression that stayed prominent in tourists’ minds

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<sup>160</sup> “20 Historic Homes Open in Charleston,” *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, 20 March 1955, Part 6, 12.

<sup>161</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 173.

was that of a picturesque and calm town, reverberating tropical and Old South charm. The city's resplendent mansions, aromatic and picturesque gardens and sultry tropical atmosphere overshadowed the city's grandiose claims to important events. It was this image—of quaint streets and stunning mansions—that visitors wanted to convey to the folks back home. They sent postcards in droves, often without even writing on them, just addressing and postmarking it so their family members could grasp some of the images the visitors encountered in Charleston. Postcard booklets were purchased with noble pictorial images of Charleston's attractions and sent as a whole.<sup>162</sup> This allowed the complete tour of Charleston to leave the city, and reach those unable to travel as well.

Tourists needed to slow down to appreciate Charleston—the city moved at a pace unknown to modern Northerners. Adopting Charleston's leisurely pace allowed tourists to appreciate the life of the Charleston natives. One reporter described how “in the midst of the upheaval and chaos of modern life in America, Charleston is possessed of an unusual degree of stability. It is in Charleston, where politeness and loveliness and consciousness of the worth of the ancestral past exist, that a traveler will come to understand the secret of the good life on this continent.”<sup>163</sup> This calm and picturesque impression was placed in tourists' minds, giving them a glimpse of how life was supposedly lived in Charleston—at a slow and relaxed pace untainted by the hustle and bustle of modern times. Northerners had to slow down to appreciate Charleston, and an article in *Travel Bazaar* magazine recommended to its readers, “The tours are designed to be taken on foot—Charleston, in fact, must be taken at a walk, not only physically, but spiritually, for only by shedding the bustling pace of life at home can the Northern visitor hope to capture a sense of life as it is lived here.”<sup>164</sup> Walking allowed tourists to delve into the mentality of Charlestonians, and appreciate the finer details of the city's charm; this charm could not be fully

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<sup>162</sup> Postcard collection, Historic Charleston Foundation, Charleston SC. Many of the postcards in the collection were addressed with postage, and postmarked, but they did not have even a short message from sender. There is one, to one lady who received a number of blank postcards that implies that though the traveler had no time to write, the image could give them an idea of the beauty of the city until they could tell them in person.

<sup>163</sup> Anthony Harrigan, “Charleston: The Place and the People” *The American Mercury*, 1954, Pamphlet collection, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

<sup>164</sup> “The Gracious City of Charleston,” *Travel Bazaar Magazine*, March 1951, 251.

understood without casting off the twentieth century attitude that valued time-saving over finding beauty in the little things.

The suggestion of spirituality in *Travel Bazaar* upheld the idea that in Charleston, the past served as its own sort of religion. Respecting the religion of the past required a quiet reverence, an appreciation for a calm and lush life. The city's inhabitants themselves revered their own history and surroundings with an almost religious ferocity. The elite Charlestonians' social practices, including their involvement in cultural societies and the annual and exclusive St. Cecilia's Ball, can be seen as religious rituals in a way—enacting traditions allowed Charlestonians to engage themselves in Charleston's religion of the past. The city and its inhabitants' reverence for the past mesmerized visitors; they reported proceeding into “the heart of enchantment”<sup>165</sup> when visiting Charleston and experiencing its spirituality.

For new visitors to Charleston, the real thing often exceeded their expectations, leading to sweeping statements about its beauty and importance that reflected their reverence of the city. A young Northern traveler wrote, “Charleston is the most ravishing old city—the most lovely city in this country it must be—old houses and garden walls, clambering flowers and vines, live oakes and palmettos...and such color—in houses and walls and atmosphere.”<sup>166</sup> All tourists had expectations of beautiful mansions and southern manners when they came to Charleston; but, the overflowing hospitality and true beauty of its sites still surprised them. A Washington D.C. woman wrote a letter to the letter of the Charleston *News & Courier* exclaiming, “But Charleston is more—much more. And minding my northside manners...Charleston has charm—but the word is not big enough. I found elegance, and good taste, but so restrained that it never becomes grandeur.”<sup>167</sup> Her letter suggested that visitors were surprised by its grace, but not intimidated or overwhelmed—the perfect combination for an unexpectedly pleasant trip. Mr. Bliss, traveling in 1941, admitted that though he expected a lot of Charleston, he “found it even more interesting, more curious and more beautiful,” and expressed a desire to do a repeat tour of the city, at an

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<sup>165</sup> “Letter to Mrs. Farmer,” 10 April 1923, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Matilda D. Mascioli, “Letters to the Editor: Visit to Charleston,” *News and Courier (Charleston)*, 27 March 1965.

even more leisurely pace so he could appreciate the minute details of its charm.<sup>168</sup> Visitors to Charleston ate up the idealized charm with delight, relishing in a chance to travel back into the past and be treated in a truly hospitable way.

The impression that many travelers could not vocalize, imprinted on their minds while driving away from Charleston, was most likely that of the grandness of the Old South. Well into the twentieth century, many decades after the Civil War, Charleston still managed to project the image of the Old South, thriving as though it were in the height of antebellum years. Herbert Ravenel Sass wrote in an article in the *Saturday Evening Post*: “Charleston has become for thousands the visible affirmation of the most glamorous of all the folk legends of America—the legend of the plantation civilization of the Old South. A single morning spent wandering through its older streets, a single afternoon at one of the great plantations which were an essential part of it, prove that there was at least one region...where the Old South really was in many ways the handsome Old South of the legend.”<sup>169</sup> This impression that the legend of the Old South was alive and well in Charleston drew visitors from all over, hoping to capture the magnolias in a modern setting. In fact, many producers of tourism and attractions recognized this desire, and capitalized on it by recreating the Old South for visitors to experience: carriage rides through plantation lands, hoop skirts to try on at the Charleston Museum and Gullah language lessons taught in former slave cabins. Many visitors coveted the life led by Charlestonians, both of the past and present, and the existence of the Old South. The gentility of life in Charleston quickly became a commodity for sale in an economically recovering Charleston as tourists were able to try their luck at becoming Charleston ladies and gentlemen.

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<sup>168</sup> George C. Bliss, “Garden Tour Scrapbook,” 1941, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

<sup>169</sup> Herbert Ravenel Sass, “The Cities of America: Charleston,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 8 February 1947.

### Part III: Twentieth Century Carpetbaggers Playing the Charleston Gentlemen

Besides the history and the stunning beauty of Charleston as a city, tourists found themselves drawn to the personality and lifestyle of Charleston's elite. Many members of Charleston's twentieth century elite descended from the original city founders, leaders and planters. The persistence of aristocratic spirit in the actions and in the names of Charleston's inner circle enthralled middle class travelers from the North and Midwest. One writer mused, "The inner world of Charleston of interest to Americans in the northern and western states [was] the world associated with the names Pinckney, Barnwell, Manigault, Ravenel, Cheves, Heyward..."<sup>170</sup> The names that this author mentioned refer to just a few of the cultural leaders of the early twentieth century boasting ancestors that influenced and dominated the city in the previous centuries. One article from the *Nashville Banner* noted that, "Today in Charleston, its golden age and the character of its people are reflected in the gracious homes...the town houses of great planters, of Colonial statesmen, and commercial leaders..."<sup>171</sup> The houses of these famous Charlestonians of the past remained the residences of the contemporary city's commercial giants, famous writers and artists and civic and cultural leadership.

It was not so much the actual people that fascinated travelers; rather, it was their way of life. A Gray Lines bus tour pamphlet advertised this appeal to its potential clients, saying "Here, at the seat of Southern culture, one finds an atmosphere of ageless dignity that has developed through generations of gracious living—of almost forgotten chivalry, such as could still live only in a city whose gallant men and lovely ladies have maintained their way of life through a history that includes a dozen romantic wars."<sup>172</sup> A visit to Charleston allowed tourists to associate with this culture, to observe and participate in its society and history. Historian Stephanie Yuhl noted that a visit to Charleston "presented an opportunity

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<sup>170</sup> Harrigan, "Charleston: The Place and the People."

<sup>171</sup> Elizabeth Cooper, "Charleston's Historic Homes and Gardens Lure Travelers," *Nashville Banner*, 25 March 1949, 31.

<sup>172</sup> "Historic Charleston, SC: A Condensed Guide with Map," Pamphlet produced by the Gray Line Bus Company, "George C. Bliss Garden Tour Scrapbook," 1941, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston SC. See Figure 12 in the Image Appendix.

to explore and possibly to associate oneself with a glamorized heritage.”<sup>173</sup> The glamorized heritage that Northern travelers wished to experience came from their conceptualizations of how people in the Old South acted. Elite Charlestonian Josephine Pinckney noted that travelers were drawn to Charleston by “the desire...to emulate the Southern tradition—the gentleman farmer, the sportsman, the aristocrat.”<sup>174</sup> To play this part, travelers to Charleston found themselves walking a little straighter, talking more properly and “minding their northside manners” to keep in Charleston character.<sup>175</sup> This desire to emulate the Charleston character suggests that for visitors, the character of its elite population was simply another commodity that could be bought in Charleston. For many travelers, pretending to be a native Charlestonian was the highlight of their journey—it allowed them to escape from their everyday lives, and enter a world they believed had less worries and troubles.

Travelers required a glimpse into the lives of the present day’s elite Charlestonians to have a more modern characterization to emulate than the antiquated image of a southern planter and plantation belle. Thus they came in part to see modern life in Charleston, and to compare it to the lifestyle of the past. In essence, tourists yearned to view this relation between past and present lifestyles in Charleston when they traveled across the country to attend the Historic Charleston Foundation’s annual house tours. In entering the homes of Charleston’s modern elite, they could see how twentieth century elites lived and compare it to the clichéd image of antebellum life they saw in movies like *Gone with the Wind*.<sup>176</sup>

Most tourists got to marvel at the private homes and lives of prominent Charlestonians for only a few days or as long as their visit to Charleston lasted; however, as time went on, and more Northerners succumbed to Charleston’s charm, many made the move to become Charlestonians themselves. Sass remarks, “Visitors began to come, exclaiming in rapture over the fine old houses...and glamour of the Old South. Soon these visitors began to buy some of the houses and become winter residents, while

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<sup>173</sup> Yuhl, *Golden Haze of Memory*, 161

<sup>174</sup> “Josephine Pinckney Papers,” South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC, from Yuhl, *Golden Haze of Memory* 179.

<sup>175</sup> Mascioli, “Letters to the Editor: Visit to Charleston.” Ms. Mascioli noted that she wanted to “mind her northside manners.”

<sup>176</sup> See Figure 13 in the Image Appendix for a typical Old South image from *Gone with the Wind*.

others bought abandoned rice plantations in the city's hinterland and maintained them as winter estates or hunting preserves."<sup>177</sup> The new Yankee residents attempted to capture the magic they had felt on their Charleston vacation for longer periods of time, adopting the Charleston way of life for the winters, or even year-round. As Josephine Pinckney observed, many of them were trying to imitate the "Southern tradition," by buying a plantation where they could hunt and play the part of the patrician plantation owner.<sup>178</sup>

The phenomenon of tourists, Northerners especially, permanently relocating to a tourist destination to become part of the local gentry they had previously revered was not known only in Charleston; it occurred in many of the romantic old cities and towns of the South. Richard Starnes observes in *Southern Journeys*, that "By the early twentieth century, southern tourism began to change...like many antebellum planters, some visitors wanted to make their southern tourist experience permanent. Wealthy visitors from both North and South built or acquired homes in resort towns such as Charleston, Pinehurst, Coral Gables, Panama City, Jekyll Island and elsewhere."<sup>179</sup> This new sort of Southern tourism—permanent tourism—came about as southern tourism, including tourism to Charleston, was picking up due to automobiles and a growing middle class. And Charleston could not help but welcome the tourists' money in their economic vulnerability. In the official guide to Charleston's Civil War Centennial commemoration in 1961, a writer reminiscing about "Charleston...Then and Now" notes that "With the help of motorcars and highways which spread southward, streams of travelers passed into the city. Some of them came to stay. They bought town houses and plantations and restored them and put them to use. Rejuvenated by this influx of new blood

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<sup>177</sup> Sass, "The Cities of America: Charleston."

<sup>178</sup> As noted above, Josephine Pinckney said, "The noblesse, the Yankees...are drawn to Charleston by the desire of those who come up in the world to emulate the Southern tradition—the gentleman farmer, the sportsman, the aristocrat," from Yuhl, *Golden Haze of Memory*, 179.

<sup>179</sup> Richard D. Starnes, introduction to *Southern Journeys: Tourism, History and Culture in the Modern South* ed. Richard D. Starnes (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 4.

and new money, the city raised her head again.”<sup>180</sup> A tourist coming for a vacation and staying for a lifetime may seem unusual, but in Charleston, it happened fairly often. Northerners, enchanted by the Charleston surroundings, lifestyle and gentility, sought to make it their own; they poured money into their new town houses and plantations, and thus into Charleston’s economy. And with an economy in as much need of revitalization as Charleston’s was in the early and mid-twentieth century, it was hard for the civic leaders and even Charleston’s residents to explicitly object to this second invasion of Yankees.

#### **Part IV: Greeting the Damn Yankees with Hospitality and Contempt**

The vast majority of tourists coming to Charleston were enamored with the city, enthralled with its history, beauty and charm. The reaction to the influx of tourists, on the other hand, was not as unanimously positive among the Charlestonians themselves. As explored in Chapter Two, especially elite Charlestonians were often hostile to change, including the modernizations needed in the city to accommodate a large tourism industry. Thus their reactions to the invasion of Northern tourists that necessitated these civic “improvements” varied from welcoming them with Charleston hospitality to resenting their presence and the necessity for their presence.

Individuals and organizations in Charleston played up the attributes that tourists coveted, both for the promotion of their beloved city and to lure the economic resources that tourists brought to an economically suffering Charleston. Individual cultural leaders, participants in the so-called “Charleston Renaissance,” romanced tourists in their artistic, literary and cultural endeavors whether this was a deliberate aim or not. The undertakings of the members of the “Charleston Renaissance” served to paint, literally and figuratively, a peaceful image of Charleston’s history of slave-ownership and plantation labor, and idealized the relationship between blue-blooded Charlestonians of past and present with their

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<sup>180</sup> A. M. Wilcox, “Charleston...Then and Now,” Official Historical Program: “The Charleston Centennial of the Confederate Commemoration 1861-1961,” 1961, Centennial Vertical File, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

black associates, slave and free.<sup>181</sup> Artists like Alice Ravenel Huger Smith and Elizabeth O'Neill Verner enticed visitors with their picturesque and paternalistic images of plantation and city life. Smith's watercolors promoted the "moonlight and magnolias" image of plantation life in the South, and Verner's sketches portrayed scenes of contentment and serenity in downtown Charleston.<sup>182</sup> The Society for the Preservation of Spirituals, founded in 1922 by descendants of slave-owners in Charleston, sang spirituals composed and sung by slaves on plantations and "presented this peculiar brand of heritage display to enthusiastic audiences."<sup>183</sup> The spirituals enchanted audiences, many composed of curious Northerners who journeyed to Charleston specifically to see the Society perform. Additionally, writings about Charleston, past and present, by elite authors like Herbert Ravenel Sass, Josephine Pinckney and DuBose Heyward drew visitors to Charleston, celebrating its romantic past, charismatic present and unique "negro underworld."<sup>184</sup> For example, the real setting of fictitious Catfish Row, the setting of Heyward's novel *Porgy*, became a popular tourist attraction, where "visitors explore Catfish Row, which has been scrubbed and beautified, and buy souvenirs in such Church Street gift shops as the Goat Cart and Porgy's."<sup>185</sup> The cultural endeavors of these artists, performers and authors, including Heyward, drew Northern tourists by enticing them with a romanticized picture of Charleston's past and present.

Charlestonians often welcomed tourists with open arms, demonstrating the generosity and warmth Northern tourists expected. Tourists to Charleston often stayed or dined with distant relatives or

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<sup>181</sup> The "Charleston Renaissance" was a cultural revitalization occurring during the years between the first and second world wars. The vast majority of the participants in the "Charleston Renaissance" were of elite and former slave holding families, such as the Gaillards, Pinckneys, Heywards, Ravenels and Hugers. The fruits of their undertakings gained fame throughout the whole country, causing tourists to come to Charleston to some of the images depicted for themselves. The "Charleston Renaissance" is explored more in depth in Chapter One and Chapter Four. Both will provide specific examples of images or prose that influenced tourists, and Chapter Four will explore how the work of some of the members of the "Charleston Renaissance" projected a racially idealized image of Charleston to the public.

<sup>182</sup> Yuhl, *Golden Haze of Memory*, 70-73. See Figures 14 and 15 in the Image Appendix for examples of the artistic representations of Smith and Verner.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-8.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>185</sup> "Charleston: A Plymouth Travel Adventure," *Plymouth Traveler*, Vol. 3, No. 10, November 1962.

friends of friends, experiencing Charleston hospitality first hand.<sup>186</sup> In 1923, a young traveler marveled that a Charlestonian of their acquaintance had left violets in their room upon their arrival to Charleston, and furthermore invited the young traveler to accompany her and other Charlestonians to church and tea.<sup>187</sup> This kindness and attentiveness were not unusual; in fact, some Charlestonians sought to promote hospitality as a frequent occurrence. Private guides in Charleston devoted themselves to the every query and whim of the traveler to advance Charleston as “not only America’s most historic city, but also the friendliest and most hospitable.”<sup>188</sup> The private guide service in Charleston provided unconnected visitors with a face to the city, allowing them to ask their peculiar questions to someone born and bred in the city and well versed in Charleston history and customs. One traveler lauded the private guides as “a group of dedicated Charlestonians who are trying to spread the fame of Charleston and to enhance her reputation as a most hospitable city.”<sup>189</sup> Thus some individual Charlestonians endeavored to project a positive image of Charleston through their hospitality and warm reception of tourists.

Guidebooks served as a type of private guide for visitors as well, and proved to be valuable for Charlestonians themselves as a way to entertain guests and promote Charleston’s finest attributes. One guidebook, published by the Junior League of Charleston, contained three different tour routes visitors could take, with information about all the buildings, sites and gardens they would see along the way. An article written about the book raves, “It is a book that you can put in the hands of house guests together with a box lunch and say ‘Today is a working day for me, follow the directions in the book and I’ll see you at dinner time—and don’t forget to take your camera with you.’ Instant hospitality, that’s what it is.”<sup>190</sup> Even when having guests became a nuisance because of work and the business of everyday life, Charlestonians had a suitable substitute for personal hospitality. Hospitality was often for hospitality’s

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<sup>186</sup> Postcard Collection, Historic Charleston Foundation, Charleston. In the post-card collections, there are some that note they are staying in the houses of names known to the people they were writing to.

<sup>187</sup> Letter to Mrs. Farmer,” 10 April 1923, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC. The gender of the letter-writer cannot be determined for certain, see footnote 7 of this chapter for further explanation.

<sup>188</sup> Metz, “Charleston Guide Service: The Unusual is Usual.”

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Tom Peck, “Junior League’s Guide to the City,” *Charleston Evening Post*, 26 February 1965.

sake only—Charlestonians were committed to the image of a friendly and welcoming city; but some of these people were not feigning this friendliness for profitability or advertisement. Rather, their upbringing and values necessitated greeting visitors with open arms.

Conversely, some Charlestonians embraced tourists solely as a necessity for the city's well-being. After the Civil War and many years of economic downturn through the early twentieth century, the city needed economic revival; many recognized tourism as a necessary evil in its cultural and economic renaissance. In the official historical program to the Centennial of 1961, the author explained, "No longer rich, but still proud and full of resources, Charlestonians saw to it that their city did not die of war wounds [after the Civil War]. One thing it possessed that survived the wreckage was a distinction of a particular kind that other American cities did not have...People began to come South to visit Charleston. The city capitalized on its fascination for strangers."<sup>191</sup> This capitalization worked on the official and unofficial level—among both organizations and individuals. As organizations streamlined and promoted Charleston's historic monuments and captivating attractions, individuals walked down the street with smiles and helpful attitudes to show the tourists they were welcome to spend their money in their beloved Charleston.

Not all Charlestonians were as committed to welcoming tourists for either hospitality's sake or for the economic betterment of the city. In recognition of this, those promoting tourism tried to rally the city behind welcoming tourists for necessity's sake. In a presentation given by the Civic Services Committee, written by a member of the Charleston elite, Samuel Gaillard Stoney acknowledged, "So the town has become a place of pilgrimage to the rest of the country...The result has been both flattering and profitable to Charleston. It has made her acquainted with a great many pleasant people who have grown to love her and have come here to spend their money. It [Charleston tourism] is, therefore, an attribute

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<sup>191</sup> Wilcox, "Charleston...Then and Now."

that must be respected even when it is not appreciated.”<sup>192</sup> Stoney urged Charlestonians to show consideration for the necessity of tourism and not impede it with rudeness or unfriendliness. The fact that Stoney needed to make a statement like this to rally Charlestonians behind tourism demonstrates that some members of the Charleston community may not have been playing their parts in welcoming tourists. Stoney recognized that many Charlestonians viewed tourism as a necessary evil; it was vital to their economic recovery and stability but objectionable due to the inconvenience and commercialization of their home city.

William Watts Ball, celebrated editor of the *Charleston News & Courier* did not appreciate the tourists flocking to Charleston. Ball bewailed, “Nothing is more dreadful than tourists, whether grasshoppers, boll weevils, or money-bagged bipeds. They will make Charleston rich or ruin her.”<sup>193</sup> Like Ball, some Charlestonians viewed the invasion of Northern tourists as a nuisance, and resented the necessity for the aid they gave to the struggling economy. Proud and rigid by nature, they turned a cold shoulder to the tourism industry, ignoring it when they could and scorning it when they could not ignore it. One writer on Charleston notes, “The root-deep prejudice against the North is poorly concealed. But the need of Northern money cannot be hidden and is sometimes extremely humiliating to those who really love Charleston.”<sup>194</sup> Humiliating perhaps because the appearance of wealthy Northerners intent on capitalizing on the economic hardships of the South was not an unknown occurrence to Charlestonians, or indeed Southerners. To more disdainful Charlestonians, the arrival of rich Northern tourists must have stirred images of the carpetbaggers after the Civil War, possibly what Ball was referring to when he called them “money-bagged bipeds.”<sup>195</sup> Some viewed these twentieth century carpetbaggers as invaders—

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<sup>192</sup> Samuel Gaillard Stoney, “This is Charleston, A Survey of the Architectural Heritage of a Unique American City”, Survey undertaken by the Civic Services Committee, 1944, Pamphlet Collection, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

<sup>193</sup> William Watts Ball quoted in Walter B. Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 493.

<sup>194</sup> Edward Twig, “Charleston: The Great Myth,” *Forum and Century*, Vol. CIII, No. 1, January 1940, 1.

<sup>195</sup> After the Civil War, Northerners moved to the South during Reconstruction to capitalize on the economic and political opportunities in the recovering South. These Northerners were known as “carpetbaggers” because of the luggage they brought with them. Having greater economic resources than Southerners recovering from the war, many purchased or leased plantations and became wealthy landowners, using freed slaves for their labor. It is

necessary because of the money they brought into the drained economy, as after the Civil War, but nonetheless undesirable intruders into their sacred city.

The vacationing tourists did not bear the brunt of this prejudice alone. Northerners who moved permanently or seasonally to Charleston were often characterized as “Damn Yankees” and implied carpetbaggers. Struggling to make a place in Charleston society, they flaunted their money, restoring plantations that had been in ruins for years due to lack of money in the old families. This bred resentment between the new Yankee moneyed class and the blue-blooded and proud but impecunious Charlestonians. William Watts Ball commented that “the odor of genteel Yankee wealth, while not suffocating, is pervading Charleston.”<sup>196</sup> The Yankee wealth bought up their former plantations, hurting their pride by forcing them to see the repairs they had struggled to pay for carried out in a flash with Yankee money. One critic of Charleston notes, “The rich in Charleston today are generally damnyankees who have come because of the legends and have stayed to make some of them real. Waging an eleventh-hour fight against the time that ‘stands still,’ these outsiders have saved some great old houses and many a plantation manor and have converted desquamating old slave quarters in narrow streets into little pastel gems that are bright enough to be done in full color in ecstatic periodicals.”<sup>197</sup> These scathing portraits of Northerners in Charleston demonstrate the divide in the city over the tourism industry. In the elite and proud society of Charleston, outsiders were viewed as threats, and the economic necessity for their presence hurt the dignity of the strong-willed Charlestonians.

Another possible explanation for the Charlestonians’ resentment of Northern tourists is that tourists’ appreciation for quaintness often intimated that its culture was backward and archaic. Modern tourists journeyed to Charleston to view relics and representations of a taboo institution—the enslavement of a large portion of the country’s citizenship.<sup>198</sup> Progressive Northerners scorned the actions of the past

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generally a derogatory term used by Southerners to describe these Northerners, implying that they were in the South to exploit the situation, and were not there to stay.

<sup>196</sup> William Watts Ball quoted in Yuhl, *Golden Haze of Memory*, 177.

<sup>197</sup> Twig, “Charleston: The Great Myth,” 2.

<sup>198</sup> The representations of slavery and race in Charleston’s tourism will be expanded upon in Chapter 4.

even while admiring the aesthetically pleasing results of slavery. Elite Charleston, proud of its ancestry and historic role even if not proud of slavery, resented this scorn for the actions of its ancestors. The community had, as one writer in *Travel Bazaar* magazine noted, “preserved its way of life through fire and flood, pestilence, economic leveling, earthquake and devastating war, and has no intention of giving up now.”<sup>199</sup> In a city where the past was sacred, to be preserved against such biblical plagues as this writer described, outside criticism of the past and the its institutions by self-important Northerners constituted almost a blasphemy to proud Charlestonians.

### **Conclusion: Have Some Class...**

Much of the antagonism that arose between elite Charlestonians and the touring public in this period of the twentieth century boils down to a difference in perceptions of class. Elite white Charlestonians were born and bred to conduct themselves in a way that would do their ancestors proud; they were polite, hospitable, discriminating and stubborn. Twentieth century tourists, many from Northern or Middle American states, were not imprinted with such a distinct code of mores and conduct; some were inconsiderate and rude, especially while on vacation when a tourist feels that they are paying to act however he or she desires. Additionally, the so-called middle-class tourists from the North and Midwest often had greater economic resources than the supposedly upper-class Charlestonians—another cause for animosity. Thus, while tourists were fascinated by elite Charleston culture as a relic of another world and another time, Charlestonians greeted tourists with unwavering hospitality and politeness but a sometimes outright disdain for their presence, their crass manners and economic superiority.

What boiled down to a class and behavioral difference was magnified because the difference had another level—a sectional difference. Divergence between the two sections of the United States had exacerbated animosity between the two through their whole history. And manners, behavior and economic resources were only a few of the contentious points between the two sections of the country.

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<sup>199</sup> “The Gracious City of Charleston,” *Travel Bazaar*, March 1951, 251.

As the twentieth century progressed, the two opposite parts of the eastern seaboard clashed on more critical issues such as race. Through the first half of the twentieth century, Charlestonians created and promoted a certain image of race relations in the city and tourists ate up this image as a part of their reverence for the class system of the South in general and Charleston in particular. As the century progressed, and relations between the races and desegregation gained national spotlight, tourists and Charlestonians alike were forced to address Charleston's treatment of race in its tourism promotion. Issues of class and section identity between Northern tourists and elite Charlestonians gave into issues over the treatment of the memories of slavery and the representation of race in mid-century Charleston, an issue between Charleston's image and challenges to this image.

## Chapter 4

### White Charleston Welcomes You, Black Charleston Serves You

A man holds the gate open for tourists entering a plantation estate, women weave baskets out of sweetgrass in the market, cooks whip up batches of shrimp and grits and benne wafers, and drivers skillfully maneuver horse drawn carriages down city streets. These images share two commonalities: they have been stereotypical scenes in Charleston's tourist district through the twentieth century, and the people performing these actions are almost exclusively members of the city's black population. Through the twentieth century, they played these roles not only in real life in Charleston, but also as characters in promotional materials, fiction and art.<sup>200</sup> Race has played a significant role in Charleston's public identity as displayed to visitors; more often than not, blacks were stereotyped in the Charleston community to promote an idealized image of racial interactions in the city's past and present.

The Charleston Renaissance of the inter-war years solidified these stereotypes, already present since the end of the Civil War. Many of the cultural endeavors of the Renaissance promoted an idealized and clichéd view of Charleston's history of slavery and twentieth century race relations. These images were the products of an elite nostalgia for the past, where their ancestors were important and affluent, and their elite position in society was unchallenged. The arrival of tourists to Charleston to see the striking antebellum scenes, seeking authenticity or staged authenticity of the past they expected, reinforced these images. As the century progressed and race became a hotter issue in the rest of the country, racial tensions evolved and glimpses of reality emerged as embarrassing blotches on Charleston's publicized racial idealism. The celebration of the centennial of the Civil War in 1961 served as a turning point in Charleston's racial image, exposing the issues of segregation and race. Charleston also faced such racially-tinged issues as slums, poverty and gentrification. Through the twentieth century, the city would

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<sup>200</sup> Promotional materials such as brochures and magazine articles, fiction such as the novel *Porgy* and then opera *Porgy and Bess*, and art such as that by Alice Ravenel Huger Smith and Elizabeth O'Neill Verner. See Figure 1 from the Introduction and Figures 14 and 15 in the Image Appendix.

struggle to correlate its large and increasingly discontented black population with its growing tourist industry and official nostalgic view of the city.

### **Part I: The “Charleston Renaissance:” Race in Prose and Pictures**

The Charleston that tourists experienced promoted a distinctly nostalgic image of racial interactions and the role of the black population. This idea reached twentieth century tourists early on through the cultural outputs of the elite Charlestonians involved in what is known as the Charleston Renaissance. In the interwar years of the 1920s and 1930s, Charleston blossomed as a cultural center, producing poems, literary works, paintings and performances that were seen and heard around the country. Artists like Elizabeth O’Neill Verner and Alice Ravenel Huger Smith depicted picturesque scenes of antebellum and twentieth century race relations and contentment. Writers such as DuBose Heyward reached readers with his social comedy of the Charleston black community called *Porgy*. The members of the Society for the Preservation of Spirituals brought the sounds of slave spirituals around the country with their performances. Though many involved in the Renaissance were blue-blooded Charleston natives, some were outsiders; despite their outsider status, “working with the patricians, espousing the same values, and wrapping themselves up in the same visions, they were able to ‘pass’ or at least be bathed in the same glory.”<sup>201</sup> The Renaissance was marked by a celebration of Charleston’s past and the relics of the past in its present, and though occasionally stereotypes were challenged, elites and outsiders alike endeavored to honor their chosen city through their various artistic forms. Historian Stephanie Yuhl noted in an essay on the Charleston Renaissance that “these individuals and cultural groups gave tangible expression to their affection for the city and their conception of its past—a past that emphasized continuing tradition, social hierarchy, and racial deference of black to white.”<sup>202</sup> But the

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<sup>201</sup> Harlan Greene and James M. Hutchisson, introduction to *Renaissance in Charleston: Art and Life in the Carolina Low Country 1900-1940* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>202</sup> Stephanie E. Yuhl, “The Legend is Truer than Fact: The Politics of Representation in the Career of Elizabeth O’Neill Verner,” *Renaissance in Charleston: Art and Life in the Carolina Low Country 1900-1940*, Ed. Harlan Greene and James M. Hutchisson, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 126.

inspirations, goals and reactions formed by the Charleston Renaissance were not as simple as Yuhl tried to show; rather, there were different factions within the group endeavoring to paint different pictures of their city.

Some members of the Charleston Renaissance attempted to break through to a more modern style, emphasizing new themes for the twentieth century such as the struggle between the races; conversely, others stuck with their traditional images of peaceful contentment in the Low Country. Harlan Greene and James M. Hutchisson remarked on these two opposite ventures: “One view offered the stark reality of blacks and whites living cheek by jowl; the other was a whitewashed panorama of splendidly maintained mansions where all knew their place and were at peace.”<sup>203</sup> These two themes clashed and produced two separate schools of artistic expression, “the real and the imagined, the back alley and the front steps, the present and the past.”<sup>204</sup> Those choosing the more modern approach tended to portray the tensions of life in Charleston. They focused on the struggles of black life, what life was like behind the stately mansions and aristocratic society, and “showed a social conscience as they grappled with the issues of the day.”<sup>205</sup> On the other hand, the other group retreated contentedly into its visions of the past projected on the twentieth century, writing, painting and putting on performances filled with reminiscence and longing for days gone by. These people, mostly the elite Charlestonians rather than the outsiders, did not ignore the changes undergone in the city, but rather “lamented change and the loss of a chimerical past” through their artistic expressions.<sup>206</sup> The tension between the two schools of artistic productions in the Charleston Renaissance not only existed in the works they yielded, but also in their desire to either promote the present or preserve the past. Some were driven by their desire for change and modernity; others were driven by their lamentations over change and a desire to preserve their vision of the past.

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<sup>203</sup> Greene and Hutchisson, *Renaissance in Charleston*, 2.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 8

Although the group that struggled to capture real and modern representations of Charleston made its impression in the artistic community and even in the rest of the country, the group promoting a sentimental and historical view of the city gained more renown and had a larger impact on the country's and tourists' perceptions of the city. The images created by this faction in the Charleston Renaissance contributed greatly to the development of idealized versions of Charleston's history. Yuhl asserted that "Charleston's cultural blossoming had much to do with myth-making. From the 'Golden Age' setting of DuBose Heyward's novel *Porgy* to the halcyon plantation scenes in Alice Ravenel Huger Smith's impressionistic watercolors, with all the Spirituals Society concerts and Preservation Society historic house tours in between, the Charleston Renaissance was a movement infused with romanticism, self-consciousness, and contradiction."<sup>207</sup> These different individuals and groups contributed to an appealing but often exaggerated or even fictitious representation of race relations and history in Charleston. Watercolorist Smith portrayed antebellum plantation scenes in the Low Country; she created "a rainbow-hued fantasy and eulogy to the past as beautiful as it was untrue."<sup>208</sup> Similarly, the Society for the Preservation of Spirituals displayed a history that was charming but often misinterpreted and trite.

The Society for the Preservation of Spirituals was founded in 1922 by slave-owner descendants, many of whom were contributors to the Charleston Renaissance in other capacities. The Society quickly became popular among whites in Charleston and then elsewhere in both the North and the South as the Society went on tour. As Yuhl interpreted their performances, they "might be best understood as the 'ceremonially embodied form' of the idealized memories and traditions of the Low Country slave plantation, as understood by the singers themselves."<sup>209</sup> At the time the Society performed, mimicry of black traditions and stereotypes was not uncommon in American in American culture. The Society was distinct because its members never attempted to become like the slaves whose songs they sang; rather, they retained the personas of blue-blooded Charlestonians, performing for other whites, Charlestonian,

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<sup>207</sup> Yuhl, "The Legend is Truer than Fact," 126.

<sup>208</sup> Greene and Hutchisson, *Renaissance in Charleston*, 9.

<sup>209</sup> Stephanie E. Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 128.

Southern and Northern alike. The concerts themselves “gave dynamic, performative shape to idyllic myths and memories about Charleston’s past, its present, and, by extension, its future.”<sup>210</sup> But the influence of the Society for the Preservation of Spirituals reached beyond the images and feelings that arose because of their performances.

The Society was active in forming interpretations of Charleston’s history and even interpreting the dynamics between white Charlestonians and their black counterparts. The members of the Society published a widely circulated book entitled *The Carolina Low Country* where essays about the geography, nature and architecture of the Low Country accompanied essays expounding on the nature of Low Country blacks and the “Negro Spiritual” they valued so highly. One particular essay called “The Negro in the Low Country,” written by Heyward, presented a historical examination of the black slave turned freeman. The essay is wrought with comments and explanations demonstrating racism and superiority alongside sentimentality and nostalgia. Artistic and literary interpretations such as this essay served as the main elements of the elite whites’ relationship with blacks transmitted to tourists at this time.

Moreover, in “The Negro in the Low Country,” Heyward endeavored to substantiate the claim of a happy relationship between slave and master, and later between black Charlestonian and elite white Charlestonian. Heyward upheld the view that slavery was a benevolent and humanitarian institution, saying that during the antebellum period “the rural Negro experienced a higher state of physical and moral well-being than at any other period in his history.”<sup>211</sup> In fact, Heyward emphasized that over the two and a half centuries of interactions between blacks and whites around Charleston, first as slaves and masters then as neighbors, there existed a “bond which has held the two classes together in affection and mutual understanding.”<sup>212</sup> In the essay, Heyward used prose and imagery to portray his nostalgic picture of the antebellum landscape, describing moon-drenched marshes, the sound of laughing slaves and the bustle of slave quarters. Heyward then asserted that the Society for the Preservation of Spirituals was a

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<sup>210</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 131.

<sup>211</sup> DuBose Heyward, “The Negro in the Low-Country,” *The Carolina Low Country*, ed. Augustine T. Smythe et al., (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), 182.

<sup>212</sup> Heyward, “The Negro in the Low-Country,” 185.

collaboration of the efforts of elites emanating from their affection and “reverence” for the slave spirituals. In performing the spirituals and educating upcoming generations about the relationship he wrote so fondly about, the Society transmitted this vision of happy harmony between master and slave, black and white, to upcoming generations and visitors alike.<sup>213</sup> The book, *The Carolina Low Country*, and Heyward’s essay exemplified what many other elites did in the Charleston Renaissance—they highlighted positive aspects of racial history, promoting a nostalgic and idealized version of both past and present.

The Charleston Renaissance proved to be short lived and the cultural blossoming of the period quietly expired before World War Two. The city no longer claimed the country’s spotlight because of its cultural endeavors, and after this twentieth century golden age, the Renaissance itself became a memory. Charleston evolved from a culturally active city into a city promoting tourism culture: a tropical and historical city with a packaged tourism agenda to offer its visitors, including remnants and memories of Charleston’s Renaissance. Harlan Greene and James M. Hutchisson note the change: “Charleston was thus considered what she was on her surface, a sleepy southern town, dozing in heat and reverie. The city fell victim to its own mythologizing...Charleston retreated—as did its artists—from the peephole to the official Chamber of Commerce view, smoothed out and airbrushed.”<sup>214</sup> For a few decades, a few in Charleston had blossomed culturally, allowing a peephole to the cultural center Charleston could have been for visitors; however, as this faded, Charleston returned to being “America’s Most Historic City.” Ironically, Charleston would celebrate the past of the Charleston Renaissance alongside its colonial and antebellum past in the tourism industry; the Renaissance had failed to captivate Charleston for long, but it would succeed in captivating visitors as a relic of the past.

The Renaissance had been too complicated for Charleston—too many different voices out of unison, competing to be heard and credited. Because Charleston was “unable to deal with the complexity,

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Greene and Hutchisson, *Renaissance in Charleston*, 16.

the next generation reduced Charleston to a trite rendition of ‘Dixie.’”<sup>215</sup> Thus, the Charleston Renaissance, though rich in cultural material and even in legacy as another historical memory, represented an idiosyncrasy in the twentieth century. This deviation from Charleston’s conventional tourism and cultural path is not insignificant; rather, its results reached people around the country. Its authors, such as DuBose Heyward and Herbert Ravenel Sass, wrote not only novels that were read all over, but magazine articles that promoted Charleston’s nostalgic past to Northerners and Southerners alike.

In March of 1939, as the Charleston Renaissance was drawing to a close, the transition from the Renaissance and the promotion of tourism culture appears in a *National Geographic* article written by DuBose Heyward. This article reached potential tourists across the country, allowing them to form impressions of Charleston through the plethora of images in the article as well as Heyward’s encouraging prose. In fact, the article even prompted people to plan a trip to Charleston; for example, George Bliss, making his trip in 1941, says in his scrapbook, “I had wished to see Charleston and its Gardens ever since reading the *National Geographic* for March 1939.”<sup>216</sup> Heyward’s article publicized a romantic view of Charleston, with ideal race relations, a happy and subservient black population, and a noble white history. As Heyward wrote, “...the city owes much of its atmosphere and light-hearted charm to the black half of its population, these people who had brought with them to America, besides the gift of labor, the gifts of laughter and song.”<sup>217</sup> This view of a Charleston “where mellow past and present meet,” or where accord between the races and versions of history existed would dominate Charleston’s tourism industry for the next few decades, until changing racial dynamics challenged the happy harmony of this created past.

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>216</sup> George C. Bliss, “Garden Tour Scrapbook,” 1941, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC, 1.

<sup>217</sup> DuBose Heyward, “Where Mellow Past and Present Meet,” *National Geographic*, Vol. LXXV, No. 3, March 1939, 287.

## Part II: Charleston at Mid-Century: Nostalgic Defensiveness and Commodification of Race

Promoters of Charleston tourism, Heyward included, frequently worked to portray the lightheartedness and contentment of the Low Country black, emphasizing the ideal relationship between blacks and whites in twentieth century Charleston. In word and image, blacks were depicted as always laughing and singing, greeting visitors and Charlestonians alike with a smile and a tip of the cap, showing deference and friendliness simultaneously. Charlestonians of the twentieth century celebrated the antebellum black heritage and expressed their view of jovial and symbolic blacks fitting into a contented niche in their community. In fact, many black families in Charleston had been in the city as long as the elite whites controlling it; rather than loathing their subservient role in the city, the elite whites contended that blacks were pleased with their status. One article emphasized, “Certainly, the Negroes manifest no contempt for the beauty that is Charleston—indeed they have feeling for it.”<sup>218</sup> The defensive tone in this statement suggest that some elites upholding the idea of a happy harmony between the races recognized potential challenges to their argument. In pictures, pamphlets promoting Charleston also depicted this image of a laughing, smiling, content black person welcoming visitors into the city. The pamphlet, “Charleston Welcomes You,” that was first presented in the Introduction, is the prime example of pamphlets and images used to spread the stereotypical image of a happy and subservient black population, welcoming tourists to their city, and ready to play their role and serve the tourists.<sup>219</sup>

Some elites recognized the possibility of racial tensions in Charleston, as it was a Southern city undergoing changes. But other Charlestonians like Herbert Ravenel Sass maintained that any real friction between the black and white populations “have been mitigated so far by the fact that its native Negroes are of a gentile and generally lovable strain, and by the further fact that here the ante-bellum system was maintained on a high plane, leaving mutual affection rather than bitterness as a long-enduring legacy.”<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Anthony Harrigan, “Charleston: The Place and the People,” *The American Mercury*, 1954, Pamphlet collection, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

<sup>219</sup> “Charleston Welcomes You Pamphlet,” George C. Bliss, “Garden Tour Scrapbook,” 1941, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston. See Figure 1 in the Introduction for the image discussed.

<sup>220</sup> Herbert Ravenel Sass, “The Cities of America: Charleston,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 8 February 1947.

Thus Sass publicized the theme in Charleston promotional literature: the good relationship between blacks and whites of their city, as opposed to the racial conflict and Jim Crow atrocities that plagued the rest of the South. The elite Charlestonians envisioned a connection between the two races that stemmed from hundreds of years of work together, looking out for one another in a benevolent and mutually beneficial rapport.

This defensive strategy upheld that slavery was well suited to the area's blacks, and out of this emerged an alliance, unlike the animosity between the races in other Southern cities where, they implied, slavery had been harsher and whites and blacks opposed one another. In a pamphlet published by the Charleston Chamber of Commerce marketing Coastal South Carolina, some promotional copy echoed this idea: "Whatever manifest injustices and disadvantages of slavery, it was suited admirably to the needs of the Low Country and to a large extent to the temperament of the Low Country Negro... There has been usually in the town an understanding between the two extremes [blacks and elite whites] that has varied from mutual tolerance to confederated sympathy."<sup>221</sup> This publication touched on several important portrayals of blacks in Charleston, slavery and the relationship between the two races. First, it emphasized that even in slavery, the treatment of blacks was benevolent, and the institution "suited" their nature. Secondly, this excerpt suggested that the relationship between blacks and elite whites of the city had varying degrees of sympathy, but was never conflict-ridden. This article echoes Heyward's earlier assertions, which defensively upheld tension-free, benign black-white relations as distinctly characteristic of Charleston and the Low Country.

Elite Charlestonians enjoyed depicting scenes of nostalgic relationships recreated in the twentieth century, allowing them to reminisce about their heritage. They promoted scenes in which the two races interacted not on an equal level, but with mutual respect of the hierarchical roles of antebellum societies. For example, the Chamber of Commerce's pamphlet on Coastal South Carolina upholds that "of all the *rapprochements* between the descendants of former owners and those of former slaves, the little groups of

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<sup>221</sup> "Gullah: Dialect of the Low-Country," Pamphlet entitled *Coastal South Carolina* published by the Chamber of Commerce, Ca. 1950, Pamphlet Collection, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

children and nursemaids, seen in sunny corners of the parks, are perhaps the most charming...they [the black nursemaids] have a love for and a tenderness toward young things...’’<sup>222</sup> This portrait of black “Mammies” playing with elite white children exemplifies the nostalgic view of the antebellum relationship maintained in the twentieth century; it emphasized the affection between the children and their caregivers to show the warmth of the relationship between the races.

As much as the relationships showed mutual appreciation and affection, neither tourists nor Charlestonians believed that the relationships were those of equals. For example, during V.S. Naipaul’s travels through the South, he talked with an elite Charlestonian, Jack Leland, who said, “I grew up in a family where we could be friends with Negroes, and had to respect them, and couldn’t take advantage of them. But you couldn’t elevate them to being social equals. I grew up believing strongly in that.”<sup>223</sup> For whites, blacks in Charleston fulfilled stereotypical roles that promoted the good race relationships of the city, but could in no ways be considered in the same stratum as the elite whites whose ancestors had owned their ancestors. As much as Charlestonians emphasized their fondness for the city’s black population, and the blacks’ supposed contentment with their place in society, it was undeniable that there was a large divide between the two groups in Charleston, much like the rest of the country. The difference was, in Charleston, this divide was emphasized in a defensive and positive light, while in the rest of the South, the two races grappled over power relationships and equality.

The inequality between the races and the clichéd portrait of the blacks’ happiness and feelings for the elite Charlestonians are further demonstrated by the stereotypical positions of employment the black population filled in twentieth century Charleston. After emancipation, the newly freed slaves of the Carolina Low Country filled positions they had previously filled as slaves. These positions of employment, such as service positions, farmers and laborers, represented the knowledge and skill sets they already possessed. Without formal education or opportunities for advancement, it proved hard for Low Country blacks, as well as blacks around the South, to break out of their traditional employment

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> V.S. Naipaul, *A Turn in the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 96.

patterns. Charleston's tourist economy reinforced these patterns to a greater degree than some other Southern cities; the positions that some blacks filled in Charleston represented not only a need for workers to fill these positions, but a need for black workers to fill the stereotype required by white Charlestonians and tourists. Particularly black workers in the service sector and those fulfilling the needs of tourists, such as carriage drivers, guides and vendors, served to promote a formulaic image of race in Charleston that tourists themselves subconsciously desired. Tourists expecting an antebellum scene intuitively fancied that their carriage should be driven by a black driver; desires for authenticity or at least staged authenticity in the tourism sector compelled many of these stereotypical employment patterns in the tourism sector.

The black Charlestonians in the more publicized positions of employment in the city's tourism industry helped disseminate a particular image to tourists of idealized race relations and nostalgia for days gone by. These workers were also good at their job, being knowledgeable in Charleston history and horticulture. Traveler George Bliss noted that "colored guides" showed his traveling party around the grounds of a plantation, pointing out certain flora with pride.<sup>224</sup> Having a black guide on a tour of a plantation brought an added component to the travelers' experience on the plantation, allowing them to believe they were seeing the plantation as a mirror image of how it functioned in antebellum times. In Charleston proper, tourists reveled in the opportunity to ride in carriages at least in part because they were driven by black drivers. One woman commented in an article about the effort to have more historical carriages that riding in carriages "makes you feel terribly dignified. You wonder how people felt back in the days when it was the only way to travel."<sup>225</sup> Thus carriage riding allowed tourists to experience the past, allowing tourists to play the southern gentleman or lady, and as drivers were trained to tell about historic sites, carriages combined the needs of driver and tour guide into one, often racially stereotyped, entity.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> George C. Bliss, "Garden Tour Scrapbook," 1941, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC, 15.

<sup>225</sup> "Like Going Back Into the Past," (*Charleston News & Courier*, 11 November 1949).

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.* See Figure 10 in the Image Appendix for a picture of carriage riders and drivers.

For many tourists, a trip to Charleston would not have been complete without a souvenir sweetgrass basket, bought in the Old Slave Market—a market not where slaves themselves had been bought and sold, but where they had come to sell their goods during antebellum times. The sweetgrass baskets, woven out of reeds that grew alongside rice, were originally used for rice cultivation. Writer Tony Horowitz, in his journeys through the South looking for remnants of the Confederacy, related an encounter with one basket-maker, Emily Haynes: “Haynes was a sharecropper’s daughter and had spent much of her childhood in the fields, using the baskets she now wove for tourists. ‘You tossed the rice up and down and let the wind blow the chaff away,’ she said. ‘Fan-‘em baskets, what we called ‘em.’ She laughed, exposing a solitary molar. ‘Now white folks use ‘em for fruit and flowers and such.’”<sup>227</sup> Relics of the past that had served a distinct purpose in the production of rice now became expensive mementos for white tourists to bring back from Charleston. Like many historic sites and artifacts in Charleston, as the economy of the region shifted from slave-based agriculture to tourism, many formerly practical items, edifices and areas now served simply as decoration, either to be observed and photographed, or brought back home. Black women would camp out in the Market weaving and selling their goods simultaneously. Images of these black women weaving baskets and selling flowers along the edges of the Market appeared as postcards and in such publications as DuBose Heyward’s article in *National Geographic*. Tourists enjoyed looking at the goods these women displayed, and took home the sweetgrass baskets as a symbol of Charleston’s past as well as its present.

Children were not left out of the business of earning money from tourists by acting in ways that pleased and entertained them. In DuBose Heyward’s article in *National Geographic*, one picture portrayed several black children dancing along the side of the road. The caption to the picture said: “Negro boys and girls along the highway near Cypress Gardens scuff syncopations when they see an automobile approaching. If the driver slows down and seems likely to stop, they increase their pace in

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<sup>227</sup> Tony Horowitz, *Confederates in the Attic* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 51.

hope of a shower of pennies.”<sup>228</sup> These children knew that to get money out of the tourists, they would have to put on a show for them, acting in a slaphappy way to fulfill the expectations of white tourists. The occupations that blacks fulfilled in Charleston’s tourism industry not only promoted the image of their contentment and furthered the city’s antebellum image; in fact, they also allowed the blacks themselves to be almost up for sale again, as tourists viewed a black tour guide, a dancing child or a basket weaver as commodities that were a part of the Charleston tourist experience.

The fascination of tourists with the Gullah language spoken by many blacks in the Low Country transformed the language itself into another aspect of Charleston not to be left alone, but to be exploited as a good for the tourism industry. The language, still spoken infrequently today, is a mix of English, Portuguese and West African words, intonations and grammar that has melded over the years to form into a distinct language. The origins of the Gullah language lie in the early years of the slave trade in the Low Country, when slaves from West Africa were traded through Portuguese traders to English settlers in South Carolina. Because many slaves lived on large plantations with great numbers of slaves, the language became integral as slaves arrived from all areas of West Africa. It allowed them to share a common language and culture, and has persisted today through conscious and unconscious preservation of tradition.<sup>229</sup> The Gullah language persisted still in the early and mid twentieth century, though with dying force and extent. One pamphlet summed up the Gullah language by saying, “Its two chief characteristics are the barbarity of its grammar and the beauty of its rhythm.”<sup>230</sup> The language, spoken quickly and rhythmically, has remained a curiosity for travelers, both because it is unlike any other regional dialect in the country, and because it is near impossible to decipher the meaning when spoken. One travel article asserts that the “Gullah speech is a version of English the outlander never masters and

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<sup>228</sup> Heyward, “Where mellow Past and Present Meet,” 298. See Figure 16 in the Image Appendix for this picture.

<sup>229</sup> “Gullah: Dialect of the Low-Country,” Pamphlet entitled *Coastal South Carolina* published by the Chamber of Commerce, Ca. 1950, Pamphlet Collection, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

scarcely understands.”<sup>231</sup> Tourists visiting Charleston delighted in hearing Gullah spoken, seeing it as a distinctive and perplexing aspect of the region as well as a historical relic to be enjoyed.

The black Gullah speech pervaded Charleston tourism from festivals to the streets to souvenir books. The annual Azalea Festival “showcased a selective array of local African American talent to provide curious white visitors with ‘glimpses into negro life in the Low Country.’ At Hibernian Hall, for example, fifty ‘genuine Gullah’ singers from nearby Wadmalaw Island, including four former slaves, performed spirituals and reenacted a religious service...”<sup>232</sup> Tourists flocking to Charleston in the 1930s to see the blooming of the azaleas and experience Charleston culture were treated to an antebellum spectacle through the performance of the Gullah singers. But travelers did not have to come at a particular time, or during certain festivals to experience the Gullah speech; rather, all they had to do was lean their head out their hotel windows. Traveler George C. Bliss remarks, “The negroes and especially the Gullah negroes have a very peculiar jargon and the cries of Negro venders is noted. One old song is given when peddling porgy—a small fish: Porgy walk, Porgy talk, Porgy eat wid knife and fork; Porgie-e-e.”<sup>233</sup> This repetition was so common in Charleston that DuBose Heyward, when looking for a name for his title character in a novel about black culture in Charleston, decided to use the word “Porgy” he had heard so many times in the streets of the city.

Visitors to Charleston could even take a bit of the Gullah language home with them, through a cookbook compiled by the elite whites of the Charleston Junior League. In the book, “Each section is introduced by pointers in Gullah: ‘No, ma’am, I ain’ fuh measure. I jes’ jedge by my own repinion. I teck muh flour and muh brown sugah, en two-t’ree glub uh muhlassis.’”<sup>234</sup> The Junior League Cookbook had traditional Charleston recipes, many of them with roots in the black Gullah culture, and cooked in the elite kitchen by black Gullah cooks. So it seemed entirely appropriate to these elite Junior League Charlestonians to introduce the recipes as their cooks would have introduced them.

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<sup>231</sup> Harrigan, “Charleston: The Place and the People.”

<sup>232</sup> Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 184.

<sup>233</sup> George C. Bliss, *Garden Tour Scrapbook*, 1941, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

<sup>234</sup> “The Gracious City of Charleston,” *Travel Bazaar Magazine*, March 1951.

Gullah speech was yet another reason for tourists to rush to Charleston, especially as its survival as a language and historical relic remained questionable. A pamphlet put out by the Charleston Chamber of Commerce suggested to visitors that “like a wine that won’t travel, [Gullah Speech] has to be tasted where it grows, and experienced to be realized. If such things interest you, don’t put off coming to the Low Country to hear it, for Gullah, like the best beasts, birds, and flowers, is vanishing before the roads and the inroads of the automobile age, which seems ready to depart with the white rhinoceros, which, as a language, it somewhat resembles.”<sup>235</sup> This publication humorously suggests that the coarse Gullah language was headed in the direction of becoming extinct, with remnants of it living only in souvenirs of Charleston’s past. Writers have suggested that the Gullah language was inseparable from Charleston, infusing the city with charm and individuality. The brochure put out by the Chamber of Commerce emphasized, “You need not leave Charleston to get the feel of [the Gullah language]. It is in the air of a city made musical by the cries of Negro vendors of fish, or flowers, and the speech of blacks and whites that is, as I have said, pervaded with the richness or at least the recollection of its rhythm.”<sup>236</sup> In fact the language so permeated the city that even in the speech of elite Charlestonians, there remain traces of Gullah rhythms and word patterns. An article in *Plymouth Traveler*, a publication put out by the Plymouth automobile dealer, noted that white Charlestonians “speak a brand of English which to the ear of a visitor often sounds foreign because many of them were reared by Gullah mammies, who in turn speak a conglomerate English-Portuguese-West African tongue.”<sup>237</sup> The influence of the Gullah language on the city of Charleston and its tourism industry shows the extent that black culture affected the perception of the city by outsiders, whether acknowledged or not. Gullah speech allowed tourists to experience an aspect of Charleston’s black culture that dated back to colonial times. The fact that it was still alive and spoken in a twentieth century city fascinated them almost as much as the “rhythm” and

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<sup>235</sup> “Gullah: Dialect of the Low-Country,” Pamphlet entitled *Coastal South Carolina* published by the Chamber of Commerce, Ca. 1950, Pamphlet Collection, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>237</sup> “Charleston: A Plymouth Travel Adventure,” *Plymouth Traveler*, Vol. 3, No. 10, November 1962.

“barbaric” sounds of the Low Country’s language. For tourists, Gullah speech was just another historic commodity that they could experience while enjoying their stay in picturesque Charleston.

### **Part III: 1961 Centennial—Race Finally Making the Headlines in Charleston**

South Carolina, known as a conservative state through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, harbored at times lynching, segregation and disenfranchisement. Blacks began to participate in politics in South Carolina during Reconstruction. After they, with the aid of Carpetbaggers and other Northerners, gained some autonomy, the Ku Klux Klan soon began raids in the state to reestablish white supremacy. Whites regained control of the state with the election of General Wade Hampton III for governor in 1876. The Democratic party, which was the “white” party at the time, would control the State Government for the next century. Through this time, the state’s whites retained control over the blacks, who constituted a majority in the state, through Jim Crow disenfranchisement. The authority of the Low Country’s white leaders during the later half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century was challenged not by the state’s blacks, but by whites in the Upcountry, led by agriculture advocate Ben “Pitchfork” Tillman.<sup>238</sup> Tillman astutely noted that the divide between the white farmers of the Upcountry, and the white “aristocrats” of the Low Country could cause the large black electorate to outvote the estranged white groups and assert their influence on state politics. So Tillman drew up a new state constitution that deprived blacks of their voting rights.<sup>239</sup> Animosity between the states’ white and black populations was not uncommon in the twentieth century—with lynching and segregation becoming significant issues in the state’s politics, even if desegregation of the 1950s and 1960s was easier in South Carolina than it was in other Southern states like Mississippi and Alabama.

Charleston, however, was only remotely involved in this political upheaval. It was not the capital, and its residents generally preferred to keep quiet about racial issues than cause a stir. Granted,

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<sup>238</sup> Walter B. Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 430-452.

<sup>239</sup> John B. Boles, *The South Through Time: A History of an American Region*, 3d ed., vol. II (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2004), 444-451.

many of the aristocrats that opposed the Upcountry whites hailed from Charleston's Low Country area; however, by the early twentieth century, many had narrowed their sphere of influence to within Charleston's political, civic and cultural scene. Thus, though equality was the farthest thing from the state of the racial affairs in Charleston, the city coasted along quietly compared to the conflicts in the rest of the state and the South. Charleston maintained a pleasant and partially true façade of compassionate relations between the two races, and clashes were hushed and covered up so as not to taint Charleston's image. This façade could not go on forever, however, without crumbling in the face of the new developments in the Civil Rights Movement and desegregation. Though to certain extent parts of the stereotypical image of blacks and race relations that Charleston projected to visitors and the public had faded by the 1960s, it took a larger event to bring Charleston's racial issues to the foreground, forcing change in its internal workings and the image it promoted to outsiders. This change can be pinpointed to a celebration in 1961 of the centennial of the Civil War that began in Charleston. This event served as a catalyst for exposing the city's hypocrisy and putting its civic image and tourism industry on a different path regarding interpretation of history and race.

The Centennial of 1961 was a national commemoration of the "War Between the States," as it was known in the South. The commemoration was organized and overseen by the Civil War Centennial Commission established by Congress and sanctioned by President Dwight Eisenhower. The purpose of the Centennial was to commemorate those brave men who fell during this time and celebrate the courage of those in reinstating the union.<sup>240</sup> Though the remembrances relied equally on Northern and Southern input, the Southern states quickly took the lead in putting effort into preparing for their parts of the Centennial. The memories of the "War Between the States" were very much more alive in the Southern states, where Confederate flags and monuments stood as tributes to lost men and a lost cause, than in the Northern states. Just as the colonial and antebellum past was a religion for Charlestonians, the

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<sup>240</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Proclamation 3382: Civil War Centennial," 7 December 1960, John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12029>.

Confederate past was a religion for Southerners.<sup>241</sup> Karl S. Betts, the Executive Director of the Civil War Centennial Commission, notes: “The South may have lost the war, but it is going to win the Centennial.”<sup>242</sup> The Centennial was set to begin in April of 1961 in Charleston, the starting place of the War. Commemorations across the country would mark “the bloodiest but most beloved chapters of U.S. history,” and ranged from speeches and dinners to reenactments and salutes, or in other words, “a binge of oratory and gunfire,” much like the war itself.<sup>243</sup> Charleston would capitalize on its pivotal part as the starting point of the Centennial to draw national coverage and tourists from across the country. Not only was Charleston trying to showcase its role in the Civil War, but also its friendly environment, picturesque atmosphere and historical attractions.

Civic leaders in Charleston recognized the importance of Charlestonians being on their best behavior, not drawing negative press or attention, during this time of intense publicity and scrutiny. The editor of Charleston’s newspaper the *News & Courier* wrote an editorial entitled “Centennial Manners” entreating Charlestonians to act with hospitality and conduct themselves in positive ways whatever their opinions on the propriety of the Centennial. He warned, “...reporters for national press, radio and television will be watching for ‘incidents.’ We urge the public, meaning local citizens and prospective visitors, to give serious thought to this subject. The reputation of the community is at stake.”<sup>244</sup> This editorial and public appeal showed the civic leaders’ recognition of the possibility of tension over the Centennial. Though their fears were not explicitly stated, concerns about possible intense Confederate celebration, racial clashes and rudeness towards Northerners were probably at the forefront of their minds.

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<sup>241</sup> Tony Horowitz’s book *Confederates in the Attic* delves into the relics of the Civil War in contemporary America, particularly in the South. In the South, the Sons, Daughters and Children of the Confederacy constitute a significant force, forming their own ideas of the reality of the Civil War. The Children of the Confederacy’s Creed states: “We pledge ourselves to preserve pure ideals, to honor the memory of our beloved Veterans; to study and teach the truths of history (one of the most important of which is, that the War Between the States was not a *rebellion* nor was its underlying cause to sustain slavery); and always to act in a manner that will reflect honor upon our noble and patriotic ancestors,” see Horowitz page 37. The memory of the Civil War was by far more closely examined and commemorated in the South than in the North, where no such prominent groups as the Sons, Daughters or Children of the Confederacy exist.

<sup>242</sup> “Centennial of the War Between the States,” 1961, Vertical File, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, SC.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> “Centennial Manners,” Editorial, (*Charleston*) *News & Courier*, 7 April 1961.

Again, civic leaders and writers showed defensiveness against possible criticism, suggesting the knowledge that the reasons for the possible criticism existed. Any one of these things would be a public relations disaster to Charleston, particularly since it was in the spotlight as setting the tone for the next four years of the Centennial. The tension, they feared, would manifest itself in the form of debates over segregation and the role of blacks in Charleston.

The tension began, in fact, even before visitors arrived in Charleston for the Centennial. Invited to the Centennial were delegates from state governments across the country, including a number of black delegates from some Northern states. Controversy arose when a black delegate from New Jersey complained that she could not get a hotel room with the rest of her white delegation due to the continuing segregation of Charleston's hotels.<sup>245</sup> Though the entire delegation was moved to the integrated Naval Base so the blacks and whites of the New Jersey delegation could be together, the situation quickly escalated into a public humiliation for Charleston as well as a point on which Northerners would harp to demonstrate Southern backwardness. Rather than letting the controversy blow over or admitting the error, Charleston leaders attempted to defend themselves by pointing the blame elsewhere. In a dinner meeting with numerous members of the various state delegations and Centennial Commission leaders, Charlestonian Ashley Halsey made a speech that "was objected to by some members of the New Jersey delegation at dinner. Halsey said that New Jersey itself was a site of many segregation practices."<sup>246</sup> In fact, Halsey was right in his statement at this dinner; well into the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, many places in New Jersey, such as movie theaters and department stores, were still segregated, with many public places not being desegregated until the late 1960s.<sup>247</sup> However true Halsey's statement was, he was pointing the blame back on the critical New Jersey delegation rather than graciously accepting his city's error or letting the controversy fade into the background. In and of itself, this controversy appears

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<sup>245</sup> "Centennial Week Crowd Arriving," *Charleston Evening Post*, 10 April 1961.

<sup>246</sup> "SC Advertisement in Magazine Killed after Race Editorial," *(Charleston) News & Courier*, 27 June 1961.

<sup>247</sup> Bryant Simon, *Boardwalk of Dreams: Atlantic City and the Fate of Urban America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 118, 140-141.

somewhat insignificant; however, Charleston was in the spotlight to set the tone for the rest of the Centennial, and the segregation controversy put Southern racial practices into question nationally.

Charleston could not afford bad press due to the race controversy, especially because much of its tourist base came from the more racially conscious North. And Charleston certainly did get bad press for the controversy. The July issue of *Holiday Magazine*, a national travel magazine with a large readership, attacked Charleston's role in the observance of the Civil War Centennial as "a shabby circus," as "some of us even now are being brutally denied certain personal freedoms."<sup>248</sup> The editorial objected not only to the segregation of Charleston, but also to its simplistic picture of its slave past and current racial problems. The editorial told its readers of Halsey's speech: "the official opening speaker...came out in favor of some of the very principles which the Civil War is generally supposed to have eradicated."<sup>249</sup> This scathing commentary on Charleston's role in the Centennial and its racial practices angered the civic leaders not only because it insulted their city, but also because it reached much of their tourist base, and contradicted their efforts to promote the city. The state had invested \$5,000 in advertising in this magazine for the Charleston area, which had to be cancelled because of the insult to the city.<sup>250</sup>

The controversy not only attacked Charlestonians' civic pride and image of racial harmony in the city. It attacked their tourist industry as they consciously packaged it. It became clear after the debacle of the 1961 Centennial that the stereotypical and picturesque portrayal of Charleston's racial past would not suffice for a new class of tourists affected by the Civil Rights Movement. These new tourists began to seek a more accurate picture of Charleston's past and present. Charleston would struggle to find a happy medium between the sweeping Old South tourism packaging and the realistic and black-conscious portrayal of its slave history. In the post-Civil Rights era, the previous packaging of an idealized racial history was too simple and no longer workable for Charleston's tourist formula, forcing producers of tourism to confront the problems of race and reality in Charleston, and more accurately portray history.

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<sup>248</sup> "SC Advertisement in Magazine Killed after Race Editorial," (*Charleston*) *News & Courier*, 27 June 1961.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*

#### **Part IV: Confronting the Problems of a Twentieth Century City**

The Centennial of 1961 highlighted the reality that Charleston faced as a twentieth century Southern city; the city was becoming increasingly divided racially, socially and economically. Consistently through the twentieth century, half of Charleston's population had been black, often living in more challenging economic situations while being pushed further and further from the city due to touristic expansion and gentrification. The reality of Charleston as an archetypal twentieth century city shocked tourists expecting to confront only cobblestone, palmetto lined streets and in fact encountering ghettos, urban sprawl and gentrification.

Many in the second half of the twentieth century noted the slum problem in Charleston, and spoke up in efforts to remove urban blight and the notice it got from tourists. In an editorial in the *News & Courier* from 1986, the editor notes, "Expecting to see one of the world's best preserved 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century cities, they are confronted by what at first sight seems to be typical American urban decay—abandoned buildings, boarded-up storefronts and blighted neighborhoods. Can this be Charleston? They ask. The answer is that it is Charleston, but that, for far too long, it has been 'the other Charleston'—the Charleston that has not shared in the city's economic renaissance."<sup>251</sup> In essence, the "other Charleston" that he speaks of is the black Charleston. Residents in these black communities suffering from urban decay often live in old and architecturally important houses that have fallen into disrepair due to lack of time, funds and the priorities of the societies working on historical preservation. And tourists take note of both the crumbling buildings and the housing projects and their undeniable link with Charleston's black community. Travel writer V.S. Naipaul observes,

In the center [of Charleston], on what must have been the site of old houses, there are black housing projects, bald brick buildings going badly down to scuffed earth, buildings that drive people out of doors and expose them and their children and their washing lines, so that the impression of slum, of many people living publicly in a small space, is as unavoidable as the impression of black faces. The east side of Charleston is also black. The houses there—some looked after, many not—are old, in the old Charleston style; but there are no tourists. So, after

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<sup>251</sup> "Saving the Other Charleston," Editorial, (*Charleston*) *News & Courier*, 7 May 1986.

the Toytown aspect of the rest of old Charleston, the blacks seem like squatters, intruders at the Charleston ball. Yet they are as old as the old families.<sup>252</sup>

Naipaul's observation that blacks in Charleston seem like "intruders at the Charleston ball" is particularly suggestive of the reality of Charleston's problems as a city and the distortion of itself that is presented to the public. The impression that blacks only participated in the city's history and present identity in their contented and usually subservient roles is usually the image that gets transmitted to tourists; yet while driving through parts of Charleston, they are confronted with blatant challenges to this view. Charleston, with a large black population, has had as many problems with racism as many other cities; and with its slow economic recovery after the Civil War and Reconstruction, it served as a prime example of a city in need of economic revitalization and urban improvement through the twentieth century. Tourism addressed some of these problems, but fixed blacks in inferior roles to fulfill tourists' stereotypical ideas and thus into lower rings of the economy. This cycle created by the needs of the tourism industry served only to reinforce the problems the black community faced economically.

Most of the revitalization of Charleston's economy and neighborhoods has been focused on Charleston's affluent and marketable downtown tourist district. Some efforts to recognize and deal with the rest of the urban blight have been undertaken by the city's civic leadership; however, when black neighborhoods got the chance to be revitalized, the effort many times resulted in gentrification of the neighborhoods, leading the way for whites to move into newly renovated houses rather than keeping them in black ownership. A good example of this process is the project undertaken by the Historic Charleston Foundation in the Ansonborough section of the city. In 1957, the Foundation endeavored to revitalize the neighborhood, not for tourism but for contemporary adequacy and usefulness. The Foundation planned to rehabilitate the houses for residential use and for offices, and was quite successful in this endeavor in the eyes of investors, business owners and the middle-class community.<sup>253</sup> However, as the appeal of the renovated houses increased, the result was displacement and gentrification. In his study of the Historic

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<sup>252</sup> Naipaul, *A Turn in the South*, 78.

<sup>253</sup> Robert Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 66.

Charleston Foundation's history, scholar Robert Weyeneth observes, "This residential transformation altered both the economic and racial composition of Ansonborough. Low-income tenants who were often—although not exclusively—African American were replaced with middle- and upper-income residents and property owners who were most often white."<sup>254</sup> Displacement of the Ansonborough residents was clearly not the objective of the Historic Charleston Foundation's undertaking, but the effect was anticipated and proclaimed "the most extensive, concentrated, permanent slum clearance or urban rehabilitation in Charleston by any organization."<sup>255</sup> Thus the benefits of neighborhood preservation and revitalization are ambiguous. On the one hand, rehabilitation of crumbling structures and preservation of architectural and historical integrity are desirable; but on the other hand, rehabilitation is almost always accompanied by displacement of lower-income residents, who simply move into a similarly decaying and affordable area of the city.

This example only proves that Charleston in the twentieth century was not only moonlight and magnolias, or tropical climate and palmettos, image that was presented to the public. The city faced racial, economic and civic problems like the rest of the country; in fact, Charleston's problems were exacerbated by their forced invisibility, overshadowed by the thriving historic district and elite community. These problems raised their heads and confronted tourists and civic leaders occasionally, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century when race was a more visible issue to the public; however, the problems proved difficult if not impossible to solve in a community that still, for the most part, clung to the picturesque over the authentic.

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<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>255</sup> "Preservation Progress," Publication of the Historic Charleston Foundation, February 1979, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC.

### **Conclusion: The Legacy of Race in Charleston Today**

It is undeniable that over the course of the twentieth century, both the portrayal and the reality of race relations changed as they were challenged from inside and out. The stereotypes created and solidified in the first half of the twentieth century were questioned in the second half of the twentieth century. By the end of the century it was no longer acceptable to depict Charleston's black population as happily subservient, nor was it acceptable to gloss over slavery as a time where blacks were suited to the types of labor they were forced to do. The exposure of problems such as segregation, slums and gentrification revealed that Charleston was not immune to tensions, and forced changes in the representations of the tourism industry.

The picturesque image of antebellum relationships and harmony has not disappeared entirely in Charleston tourism today; rather, it still pervades the impression tourists garner from such attractions as the plantations and historic houses. The difference that was made in the late twentieth century amounts to additions to the attractions addressing the harsh realities of slavery and race in Charleston's past. For example, the Middleton Place Plantation added a tour called the "African American Focus Tour" to its repertoire, highlighting black experiences during the Middleton Place Plantation's history. I took this tour while in Charleston doing research. It was my second time visiting Middleton Place. The first time I had taken the stereotypical carriage tour of the grounds, walked the gardens and toured the family mansion; and as I flew around the plantation in a horse drawn carriage, I wondered how black history fit into such an idyllic setting. By taking the African American Focus tour, I learned about the hardships of living in slave cabins, the development of slaves' religion, and the arduous labor required on a rice plantation. After my second visit to the Middleton Place, I felt that I had a much better grasp of the reality of slavery on a Low Country plantation. However, this reality is not forced upon tourists; rather, it has to be bought at an extra cost, as the African American Focus tour is not a part of the General Admission to the plantation. Similarly, the Aiken-Rhett house allows visitors to explore slave life, work and hierarchies in an urban household through a tape-cassette guided tour of the house's dependencies

such as the carriage house, the kitchen, and the slave quarters. Both of these attractions, along with a few others, have made a substantial effort to expose the reality of slave life in Charleston, challenging the ideas promoted throughout the twentieth century.

Much has changed in Charleston tourism regarding race, but what is fascinating is what has remained the same. The highlights of a tour of Charleston are still the picturesque and stunning images of opulence, horticultural splendor and antebellum romance. At the plantations, one can hardly help but get caught up in the idealistic lives of the families that owned the plantations. On the streets, tourists are swept up in the majesty of the houses, and relish in the opportunity to view the cityscapes in the opulence and dignity of a horse-drawn carriage (with diapered horses, of course, so as not to offend twenty-first century noses). And it is quite easy for tourists to get completely caught up in this version of Charleston, as it is the Charleston that is most enjoyable for a vacation from everyday life.

More astute tourists perceive how Charleston tourism still puts the reality of slavery and race in the background. When family and friends ask me about the subject of my thesis, many have perceptively picked up on what is lacking in tourism in Charleston. One family member commented that though she enjoyed riding around in a carriage and trying on hoop skirts in the Charleston Museum, she felt a distinct lack of attention paid to the black majority of the city that has existed since colonial times. She felt that the Charleston she experienced was marketed to deliver the most enjoyable and un-objectionable experience possible; itineraries the city promoted left out the unsavory. A couple of well-educated family friends were similarly surprised at the lack of emphasis on the history of slavery, the slave trade, and segregation in Charleston. In short, they were surprised that in a Southern city presenting itself as a historical tourist attraction a substantial part of the city's history was evaded and under-emphasized. The impressions that I gathered from well educated, observant and broadminded twenty-first century tourists only served to emphasize the points of this chapter that I had gathered from the historical sources of the twentieth century. Thanks to vigorous promotion, the pervasive nostalgia of elite Charlestonians

sustained an idealized past through the challenges and advancements of modernity into the twenty-first century.

## Conclusion

### Twenty-First Century Charleston: Going Around Again

In 2006, Boone Hall Plantation added two features to its repertoire for tourists' entertainment and knowledge: one interactive performance called "Life in the South" and another called "Exploring Gullah Culture." Boone Hall touts the two additions as allowing tourists to see "The Greatest Values in Charleston History," and to "explore the issues and living conditions of a culture and time that shaped the South's deep traditions."<sup>256</sup> The first of these additions, "Life in the South," depicts the trivialities that planters in Charleston faced: a young belle debates which beau she should marry while the rest of her family gets ready for a ball. With the women dressed in hoop-skirts, the performance plays out on the front porch of Boone Hall's plantation house, with the audience looking up at the porch from the driveway and gardens.

About one hundred meters away, at the end of a row of restored slave cabins, another performance informs and entertains tourists. "Exploring Gullah Culture" features two black Charlestonians who grew up speaking Gullah. This husband and wife pair attempt to inform the audience about the "evolution and mystique of Gullah culture,"<sup>257</sup> by translating Gullah stories and teaching Gullah songs and rhythms. Audience members are called up to the makeshift stage at the back of the slave cabin to aid in keeping rhythm with African instruments, and by the end of the performance, tourists have heard an incomprehensible story told in Gullah speech.

Do these additions to Boone Hall Plantation represent progress in the evolution of an accurate and unbiased history of Charleston, or a regression to the same stereotypes that tourists wanted to see through the twentieth century? On the one hand, the Gullah culture presentation seeks to inform the audience about a tradition of the Low Country that existed and evolved over years of both slavery and freedom.

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<sup>256</sup> Boone Hall Plantation, *boonehallplantation.com*, 2007. <http://www.boonehallplantation.com/> (28 February, 2007).

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

The presentation is far from derogatory about the Gullah culture and the black population it encompasses—the two performers are proclaimed enthusiasts of Gullah culture and are black themselves. Rather, it is the positioning of the Gullah presentation in relation to the presentation on the plantation family that suggests the divide between the treatment of the history of past elite Charlestonians and the treatment of the history of Charleston’s black culture. The Gullah presentation is confined to the back of the slave cabins, while the antebellum Old South presentation is put on a pedestal on the front steps. Is this simply a presentation of two subjects in an “exceptionally entertaining, enlightening and educational manner,”<sup>258</sup> or does it hint to the persistence of a segregated, idealized history in twenty-first century tourism?

The fact is, few things have changed in Charleston in the progression from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. Tourists still come to the city with similar escapist motivations, and promoters still greet them with the romanticized history they seek. The question is, do the changes that have been and continue to be made in the tourist attractions and the promotion of Charleston tourism represent a diversion from or an adherence to the tradition of selective historical tourism? At Boone Hall, it is anyone’s call. Viewed together, the two presentations can be seen to balance different perspectives of antebellum plantation life; viewed separately, they can be seen as emphasizing opposite conclusions. The front door-back steps image is provocative.

Charleston faces challenges beyond what historical groups to highlight on plantation tours. The age of tourism is changing now as drastically as it was changing at the turn of the twentieth century. Twenty-first century tourists come from backgrounds less tolerant of the archaic and have greater resources to travel further to truly exotic locations. The days when a family would hop in the car to make a tour of the South are quickly fading, as families hop on planes to explore foreign countries. As foreign travel becomes easier and more affordable, a vacation within the United States loses some of its appeal; after all, it does not include a passport stamp.

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid

Another tourist audience of the twenty-first century left unaddressed is the black tourist audience. Not surprisingly, Charleston is not the first choice of many black tourists; racism and conflict pervade both the city's history and the state's politics. One black traveler to Charleston, writing in 2006 in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, notes that "I was acutely aware of the economic boycott of South Carolina over the flying of the Confederate flag at the state Capitol and of the state's reputation for entrenched racism."<sup>259</sup> Furthermore, regarding the history of its blacks, Charleston, she observes, makes "no apologies, just acknowledgements that slavery helped make Charleston the jewel it is today."<sup>260</sup> This echoes the sentiment expressed in the Society for the Preservation of Spirituals' 1931 book, *The Carolina Low Country*, where the elites of Charleston acknowledge that the "gift of labor" given by the black slaves of the Low Country made the region affluent and appealing.<sup>261</sup> Thus, more than seventy years later, Charleston still makes no overt acts of contrition for the horrors of slavery. The present combination of no apologies, blatant racism, and reverence of a contradictory past (not to mention the NAACP boycott of South Carolina) seem a recipe for disaster for prospects of Charleston's attraction for black travelers. However, this black tourist, Monica Williams, fell victim to the seduction the city knowingly executes; she admits with melancholy, "Despite her past and the controversy surrounding her present, I've fallen for this Southern lady and her charisma."<sup>262</sup> If Charleston's quaintness and historical importance can woo even a traveler wary of the city for its racialized image, the future of Charleston's tourism cannot be too grave.

In fact, the numbers suggest that Charleston's tourism is only increasing in the face of competition with foreign travel and a persisting controversy over typifications of race and the treatment of history. The number of visitors traveling to Charleston annually jumped from 3.2 million in 1997 to 4.7 million in 2004. This represents a \$3 billion increase in the economic impact of tourism on the

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<sup>259</sup> Monica L. Williams, "For a black traveler, a conflict eased," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 September 2006, N7.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> DuBose Heyward, "The Negro in the Low-Country," *The Carolina Low Country*, ed. Augustine T. Smythe et al., (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), 182.

<sup>262</sup> Williams, "For a black traveler, a conflict eased," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Charleston region.<sup>263</sup> These numbers suggest the same resilience to adversity and challenge characteristic of Charleston's three hundred and fifty year history.

The tourism trends of the twentieth century allowed Charleston to enjoy its fruitful tourism industry in the twenty-first century. The Charlestonians' devotion to the relics of the past over the present, the image of the Old South and placement of race in a nostalgic haze created the repartee between producers and consumers of tourism that proved to be so profitable for the city's economy. The social hierarchy allowed producers of tourism to uphold their evocative idealized image of the city's past; and on their end, the consumers demanded this image from the Charlestonians. Visitors to Charleston had, and to a certain extent still have, an image of what Charleston should look like, and what they should experience there, that reflected the romantic view of the city; the media and promotional materials only cemented this image. Thus the actions of the producers and consumers of tourism in Charleston reinforced one another—if the consumers had demanded an updated Charleston, necessity would have prompted the producers to comply to a certain extent. But much of the time, the producers and consumers of tourism were on the same page with their expectations of the Charleston that they both wanted to experience. Both parties clung to the past in Charleston, nostalgically cherishing it as a rare commodity; as the twentieth century progressed, and life revolved around them at a quicker pace, tourists and Charlestonians alike relied on Charleston's slow pace to stop and enjoy a leisurely life.

In this dated twentieth century Charleston, the tourism industry was more susceptible to conflict due to its rigidity and adherence to a time gone by. In the twentieth century, challenges to the industry evolved around technology and sectional and racial prejudices; these issues projected more prominently on Charleston simply because of the attributes of the city that appealed to both producers and consumers of tourism—its idealized history, its adherence to the past and its civic pride. Debates that arose in this time related to issues playing out in the nation as a whole, but stirred controversy and mixed reactions in Charleston due to its particular character. Through its long history, it has been like a rebellious favorite

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<sup>263</sup> "Charleston Metro Area Visitor Industry Impact Overview," Prepared by the Center for Business Research, Charleston Metro Area Chamber of Commerce, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

child—simultaneously cherished and tolerated in its stubborn uprisings. It has suffered the consequences of problems of its own making since the beginning of its history, and amazingly, it has almost always triumphed over these problems with its simultaneous ferocity and charm.

The city of Charleston will continue to stir debate, because that is just what Charleston does. If any city could earn the description as charismatic, Charleston would certainly do so. So committed to its history and identity, it offends tourists at the same time as seducing them, sometimes against their will. And perhaps, a century from now, somebody will deign to study the tourism developments of the twenty-first century, because with the direction in which Charleston is headed, there is bound to be plenty of material for examination.

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