

Press Release



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Drayton Hall Celebrates Its Remarkable Women, Past and Present, during National Women's History Month

*Special House Tours Announced - Saturdays and Sundays during March
10:00am and 2:00pm*

Charleston, South Carolina, February 15, 2010 — Over the past three centuries, Drayton Hall has been home to generations of women, both white and black, who have distinguished themselves in remarkable ways. On Saturdays and Sundays during the month of March, Drayton Hall's 10:00am and 2:00pm house tours will be focused on the lives of the women connected with this circa 1738 historic site, including early preservationist Miss Charlotta (1884-1969). Reservations are highly recommended as these tours will fill up fast; please call (843) 769-2638, Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm, to reserve. *Included with regular admission.*

The Women of Drayton Hall

"There's a tendency for people to think of the women on Southern plantations as leading a life of 'moonlight and magnolias' or perhaps similar to wealthy women of title in English manor homes. Nothing could be further from the truth," explained Pattie Jack, a Drayton Hall interpreter who has made it her mission to debunk the myths surrounding the plantation mistress. With a Master's Degree in History and a twenty-five year career in museum education, Pattie has enjoyed researching Drayton Hall's history through the lives of its women.

"By necessity, Drayton Hall women had to be strong, smart, and independent," said Ms. Jack. "There was no huge 'upstairs/downstairs' staff as some of our visitors imagine. Instead, the Drayton wives and women across the South, were responsible for running the plantation household and everything that entailed: from directly supervising the enslaved domestic staff, to serving as surrogate planters and making important economic decisions while their husbands were away for extended periods. They also often personally handled some of the plantation's most unpleasant tasks. For example, part of a typical day might see her supervising the proper slaughter of animals and then hand-scraping the intestines for sausage casings, or perhaps salting or pickling the raw meat to preserve it."

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According to Ms. Jack, even though Drayton Hall was one of the finest plantation homes of its day in terms of material possessions and the family's social and political standing, that status along with its hundreds of comforts, both large and small, "could not be sustained without the daily and often heroic efforts of its women."

One of these women was Rebecca Perry Drayton (1759-1840), who Drayton Hall interpreter Jill Foster describes as "A source of inspiration to me. She was a business woman when that was unthinkable. After becoming independently wealthy, she gathered her financial resources (including the proceeds from the sale of her furniture) and put the money into trust for her slaves. By enlisting the help of friends, who agreed to take on their guardianship, Rebecca was able to get around the South Carolina law that made it illegal for owners to free their slaves. After that was arranged, she gave her slaves access to the needed funds to start new lives."



Eliza Gantt married Charles Henry Drayton in 1872. She was the mother of future preservationist Charlotta Drayton, who inherited her mother's strength of character.



Charlotta Drayton (1884-1969) was an early preservationist who first opened the doors of Drayton Hall to the visiting public in the 1930s; she left a provision in her will asking her nephews not to make any major changes to the main house.



Anna Bryan Bowens in the early 1900s.

Since Drayton Hall was first under construction in 1738, African-American women and men have played important roles in its development and the production of its wealth. Oral history describes the ancestors of one family, the Bowens, arriving as slaves in the 1670s. Many of the Bowens descendants still live in the Charleston area; in fact, the great-granddaughters of Catherine Bowens, Catherine Braxton and Rebecca Campbell, live not far from Drayton Hall and are members of its African-American Memorial Steering Committee.

While there are doubtless many stories of strength, skill, and survival that have been lost to history, surviving records tell of an African-American slave, Cath Drayton, "Formerly slave to Mrs. Drayton near Charlestown", who escaped during the American Revolution. A Black Loyalist, in 1783 she was listed on the ship *Ann & Elizabeth* bound for Port Roseway, Nova Scotia, where she helped found a number of free black settlements.



Sisters and slave descendants of the Bowens family at Drayton Hall, Catherine Braxton (left) and Rebecca Campbell examine a headstone in the African-American cemetery. Today, the women are active members of Drayton Hall's African-American Memorial Steering Committee.



The Littlest Women of Drayton Hall

Seventh-generation Charles Drayton is surrounded by his great-grandchildren on the steps of his ancestral home, Drayton Hall.

What to expect on a Drayton Hall House Tour

Every Drayton Hall House Tour is unique because each one is unscripted: Drayton Hall's professional interpreters not only design their own program after extensive research and training, they continue to enrich their presentations through Drayton Hall's ongoing research and archaeological investigations. As a result, while all presentations offer a solid overview of the history of Drayton Hall and its people, they may be told through the lens of women's history, African-American history, architecture, culture, or other field of interest. "Nothing gave us the impression of another time so well as Drayton Hall standing untouched by reconstruction on the banks of the Ashley River," said visitor Alice Cooke from Fairfield, Connecticut. "Thank you for making our trip such a rich and rewarding experience."

Read More About Women's History at the Drayton Hall Museum Shop

Visitors can learn more about their discoveries during National Women's History Month through the books available for sale in the Museum Shop. Now through the end of March, guests save 15% on featured women's history titles.

Recommended reading:

- *The Plantation Mistress* by Catherine Clinton
- *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs
- *A Diary from Dixie* by Mary Chesnut
- *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* by Margaret Fuller
- *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the South* by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese



ABOUT DRAYTON HALL...MORE THAN A HOUSE.

Drayton Hall is the oldest preserved plantation house in America that is open to the public; it is a National Historic Landmark and a historic site of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. After seven generations, the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, and numerous hurricanes and earthquakes, the main house remains in nearly original condition. Built between 1738 and 1742, the entire site — including the historic grounds with its ancient live oaks, broad vistas, vanished structures, and rare period features — serves as a testimony to America’s heritage. Drayton Hall is accredited by the American Association of Museums and is open to the public daily, except Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve and Day, and New Years Day. For more information, visit the Drayton Hall web site at www.draytonhall.org.



ABOUT THE NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a non-profit membership organization bringing people together to protect, enhance, and enjoy the places that matter to them. By saving the places where great moments from history - and the important moments of everyday life - took place, the National Trust for Historic Preservation helps revitalize neighborhoods and communities, spark economic development, and promote environmental sustainability. With headquarters in Washington D.C., 9 regional and field offices, 29 historic sites, and partner organizations in all 50 states, the National Trust for Historic Preservation provides leadership, education, advocacy, and resources to a national network of people, organizations, and local communities committed to saving places, connecting us to our history, and collectively shaping the future of America’s stories. For more information visit www.PreservationNation.org

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High Resolution Images

Available for download at our Press Room at www.draytonhall.org/news/pressroom/ or contact Communications Coordinator Natalie Baker at (843) 769-2638 or natalie_baker@draytonhall.org

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