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Tales of the City

Stitched in Time

Local sweetgrass basket weavers keep an age-old African art alive

What's Next for the Neck?

Developers and city planners are working to revitalize an industrial wasteland

Remnants of Rice Fields

Photographer David Soliday focuses on the remains of some historic Lowcountry farmlands



also:

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Banks of the Black: An ancient cypress stands on the muddy banks of the Black River at the end of a hand-dredged canal that once fed the old rice fields at Mansfield Plantation.



Blacksburg, Virginia, the town where the film *The Patriot* was set. The red sign is for the local historical society.

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That afternoon we drove a few miles up Highway 701 to Mansfield Plantation, a 1,000-acre former rice plantation on the Black River. The entrance creates great anticipation, as you bump along an unpaved road through the woods, with low brick gates and walls leading the way. And before arriving at the main house and buildings—where scenes from *The Patriot* were filmed a few years ago—we passed a lane of small, simple houses with front porches and bowed

rooftops. These, we realized, are former slave houses, one a plank-sided chapel with a leaning bell tower still in place. Later we'd walk around these structures in the stark, cold daylight, and touch the rough, hand-cut shingles. The decaying buildings are an amazing and eerie sight.

At Mansfield, we stayed in a guest cottage that was built in the 1930s but designed to mimic the style of the main house, down to the molding and cornice work. Innkeeper





Plantation Living: (Top) Mansfield's opulently furnished guest cottages were built in the 1930s to resemble the plantation's original buildings. (Left) Portions of Mansfield's past remain intact, including parts of a rice mill near the winnowing barn. (Middle) The entrance to the property has changed little since it was built in 1718. (Right) Haunting reminders of a once enslaved work force remain throughout the grounds, including the chapel that stands among the remaining slave quarters.



Classical Elegance: Guest cottages at Mansfield Plantation are comfortably appointed with a mix of colonial-era furnishings and modern touches.

Kathryn Green recommended we watch a documentary *When Rice Was King* that she left in the room. We did, and learned more of the fascinating—and heartbreaking—rice culture of the region, including seeing footage of remaining buildings and equipment at Mansfield Plantation.

In the morning, as we nibbled on fruit and French toast at a fireside table in the main house set with silver, crystal, and china. There, former Charleston resident Sallie Middleton Parker joined us for coffee and told us that she and her husband, John Parker, have a home in Asheville and recently purchased the Mansfield property, which had belonged to his family in the 1800s. She asked what we planned to do that chilly morning and suggested a walk along the plantation's rice dikes, trunks, and hand-dug canals that still remain. Within 10 to 15 minutes we'd get to river's edge, she said, and "you'll see the most gorgeous cypress tree."

Of course, we wrapped ourselves in coats and hats and started right out. It was duck hunting season, and we could hear the crack of shotguns in the distance. We followed the wrong path for a while, before we finally reached the banks of the Black River, admiring a lone cypress tree rising tall from the muddy edge, the tea-colored water swirling by. The sight was even better than Sallie Parker (or the cabinetmaker we'd met at the Rice Paddy) said it would be, with foliage turned gold for the season, against the bright sky of a winter morning. 