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Peachtree Plantation Was Home To

By ELSA F. McDOWELL
Post-Courier Reporter

Peachtree Plantation on the South Santee River lies in ruins, but in its day, it was the stately home of one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and almost made the list of places where George Washington slept.

Unlike most plantation houses, which were comfortable and utilitarian but not lavish, the building at Peachtree appears to have been one of considerable importance — similar in size and scale to Drayton Hall.

Judging from the ruins, which are extensive enough to suggest the full dimensions and floor plan of the house, it was about 48 by 55 feet. The house included a full two stories above a 9-foot basement level.

Thomas Lynch built Peachtree, the ruins of which lie near Fairfield Plantation on the Santee delta, probably between 1740 and 1760. Thomas Lynch Jr. was born Aug. 5, 1749, at Hopsewee Plantation. Hopsewee was sold in 1752 to Robert Hume.

Peachtree Plantation's name, according to current owner Samuel B. King, is a corrupted version of the original. The grounds once included a tremendous oak tree that people gathered under for shade. It was called the Peachtree. Over the years, the name was corrupted to Peachtree.

The Lynches, who had been Roman Catholics, embraced the Church of England after King George II promised to reward them with land. They settled in Carolina by the end of the 17th century and became a prominent and wealthy Lowcountry family.

Thomas Lynch, born two generations later in 1726, was a successful indigo planter and husband of Elizabeth Alston, who came from another respected planter family on the Santee. He is considered to have been one of the wealthiest men in the Lowcountry and was influential in Georgetown as well as Charleston where he also kept a residence.

Thomas Lynch Jr., while given a traditional education in England including the study of law, returned to the Lowcountry and continued planting. He also served in South Carolina's first Provincial Congress and was a captain in the First Regi-

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ment of Provincial Troops.

Father and son were important figures during the Revolutionary period. The senior Lynch was a delegate to the Continental Congress and served in an advisory role to Gen. George Washington, who was organizing the Continental Army.

However, he had a stroke in 1776 and his son was appointed to the S.C. delegation to care for him and assume the responsibilities of a delegate.

Father and son signed the letter to inform S.C. President John Rutledge that independence had been declared, but only Thomas Lynch Jr. signed the Declaration of Independence. His father was too ill and there is an empty space on the document where the signature of Thomas Lynch was to have been.

The father died later that year en route to South Carolina. His son, who was also ill, left in 1779 for the south of France in hopes of regaining his health. The ship went down in a storm and there were no survivors.

The house he left had elaborate north and south entrances. The north had a squared staircase of silverstone steps and the south, a semicircular one. The porch was paved in red tiles about 2 inches thick and 9 inches square. Two of these tiles are set in cement and incorporated in the Signers' Walk at Hemlock Arboretum in Germantown, Pa.

It appears that one would have entered from the north a large room three bays wide with a room two bays wide to the east. On the south, after a recessed entrance porch, was a hallway three bays wide flanked by two smaller rooms. There also appears to have been a service staircase to the west.

The house was made of brick laid in English bond, held by an oyster shell mortar and covered on interior and exterior with stucco. The walls were nearly 3 feet thick at the basement level. Windows were unusually

tall — about 6 feet from sill to segmental arch.

It was in 1791 during his tour of southern states that Washington almost slept at Peachtree. Since Thomas Lynch Jr. had no children, he left Peachtree to his nephew John Lynch Bowman under the condition that Bowman change his name to John Bowman Lynch.

As his uncle and Washington had been colleagues, he wrote to the president, inviting him to "accept the accommodations of the house." But 11 days later he wrote a second letter telling Washington he had the measles.

The president and his party took a wide swing around Peachtree and another "George Washington slept here" tradition was lost.

Another popular tale, King says, is that at some point in Peachtree's history, a French ship destined for Charleston was not allowed into port because a young man aboard was ill with a dread and contagious disease. The family at Peachtree invited the young man to recuperate at the plantation.

A young woman in the family fell in love with the Frenchman. When he was well enough to sail, he promised to return and marry her.

King says the story goes that after he left, his bride-to-be fell ill with the same disease. After she died she was buried on the grounds in an upright position, facing the river as if waiting for her love's return.



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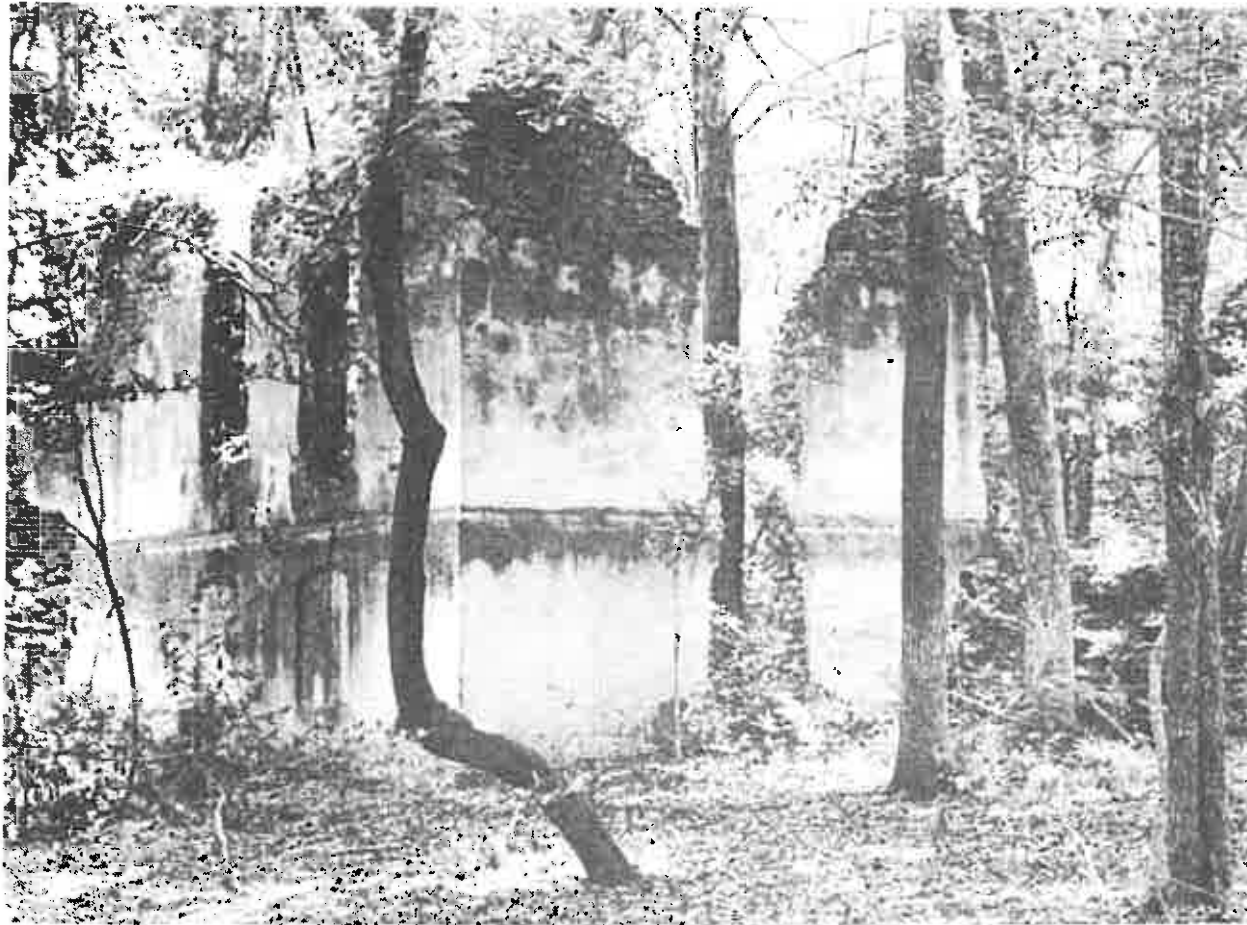
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Staff Photo by Jim Parker

Owner says plantation's name is corruption of 'Preachtree.'