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Lowndes Grove Has Long And Distinguished History

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 Special Writer

While the original design of the walled city of Charles Towne was laid out in formal style along the bank of the Cooper River with small lots and narrow streets, the remainder of the peninsula was partitioned into scaled-down plantations.

One of these became known as Lowndes Grove, the manor house of which still occupies an area north of The Citadel overlooking the Ashley River. Lowndes Grove at one time included part of the acreage which later became small farms that supplied much of the green vegetables for downtown Charleston residents.

The first settler to own the property was Richard Cartwright, who acquired it by a grant from the Lords Proprietor in 1695. At that time it was about two miles outside the limits of the original walled city and considered vulnerable to attack by Indians, French and Spanish.

Cartwright's sons inherited the lands and, in 1738, Daniel Cartwright sold the property to John Braithwaite. While there is a gap in the ownership succession, in 1769, John Gibbes was listed as the owner. That same year he obtained a grant to the adjacent marshlands.

By the start of the American Revolution, Gibbes had erected a residence and named the tract of land Orange Grove, derived from the effort to grow Seville oranges there.

That also is the derivation of the

name of Orange Street in downtown Charleston. However, the occasional severity of Charleston's winters defeated these efforts at producing citrus. Today, a few Seville orange trees survive in the Lowcountry, relics of those early attempts to establish a citrus industry.

The house built by Gibbes was destroyed by fire and a niece inherited the land. Her husband, George Abbott Hall, apparently built the present house after the American Revolution and before 1790.

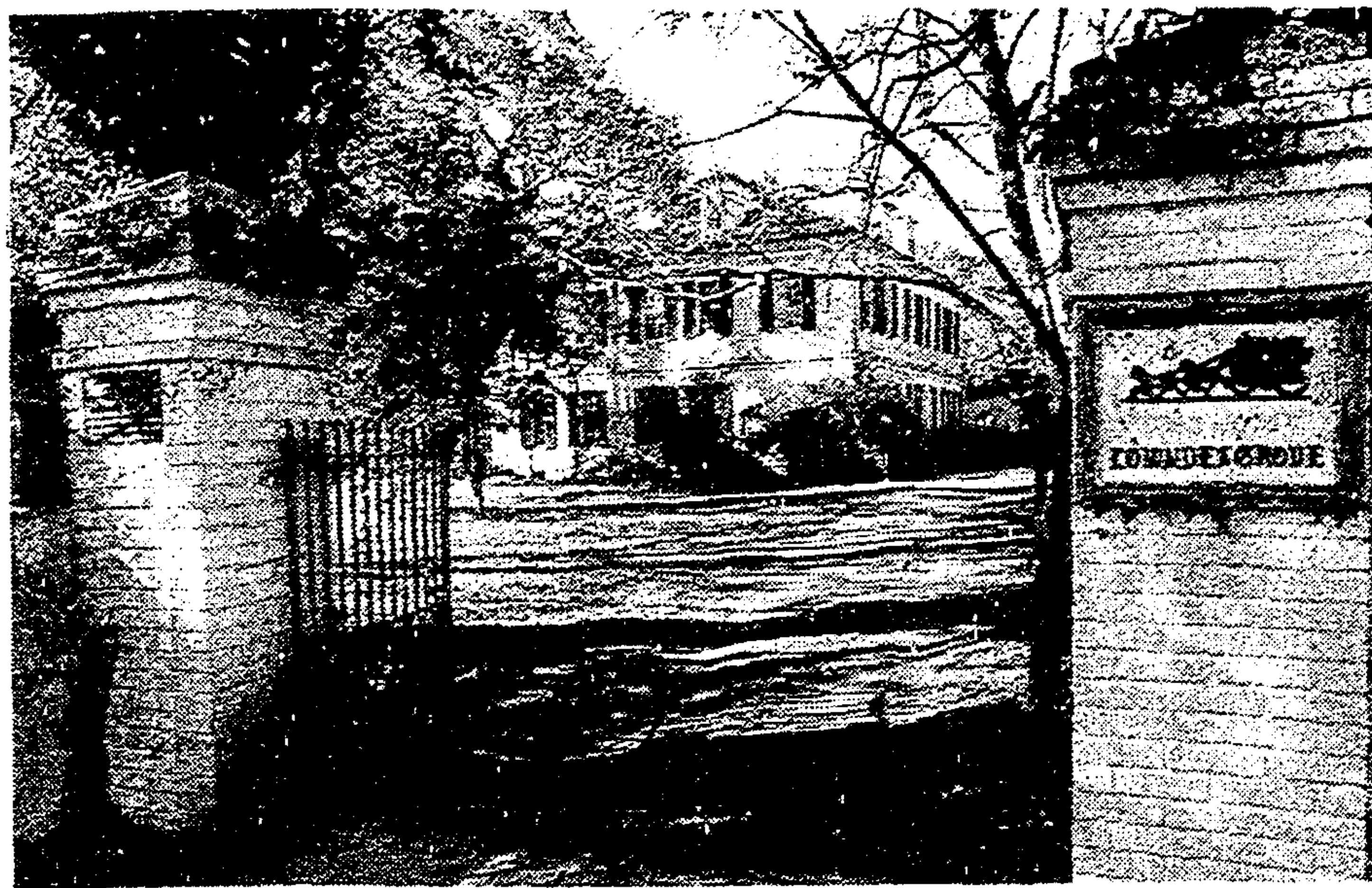
The property also was referred to in early reports as The Grove Plantation and The Grove Farm.

U.S. Rep. William Lowndes, a member of a prominent Charleston family, bought the property in 1804 and it bears his name. One of the more interesting incidents concerning the property was a duel between two American generals, Christopher Gadsden of Charleston, a firebrand in the Revolutionary War movement in Charleston, and Robert Howe of North Carolina.

Troubles between the two generals began in 1776 when Howe was placed in charge of continental forces in South Carolina, he being the senior general of the Continental Line then in the state. Gadsden objected, contending he deserved the command.

Gadsden had rather definite opinions and he disagreed strongly with Howe's ideas of military operations. He wrote a letter to the Continental Congress and the South Carolina Gen-

Do You Know Your Charleston?



Staff Photo by Tom Spain

Lowndes Grove has an imposing setting.

eral Assembly that was sharply critical of Howe's conduct of military operations in Georgia in 1778. Gadsden resigned his commission as a general and he and Howe agreed to a duel.

Neither was injured. Howe fired first and missed. Gadsden then pointed his pistol over his left arm and the bullet disappeared in some

trees. An old engraving shows the two generals standing with raised pistols in a woodland setting with their aides standing by. Gadsden's second was Col. Barnard Elliott while Col. Charles Cotesworth Pinckney represented Howe.

The duel became the subject of an article that appeared in the South Carolina and American General Ga-

zette on Sept. 3, 1778, just four days after it occurred. In New York City, Maj. John Andre, the British spy, wrote a lengthy parody in verse, a piece of humorous writing that delighted the Red Coats and angered the Colonials.

However, there are conflicting reports on the location of the duel. One report has it that it occurred near Rutledge Avenue and Bogard Street, which would have been about a half-mile from the present site of the Lowndes Grove house.

The property has been mentioned in a number of studies, including Alexander Garden's "Anecdotes of the American Revolution." Garden, who was married to a niece of Gibbes, reported that the garden of exotic plants was destroyed by British troops under Gen. Augustine Prevost during an unsuccessful assault on Charleston in May 1779.

A book, "The Siege of Charleston," quotes Hessian officers, who were fighting as mercenary troops for the British, as describing the house and its gardens as "one of the most beautiful pleasure gardens in the world."

The house and gardens definitely were still intact in 1780 when the army of Gen. Sir Henry Clinton captured Charleston. Clinton's maps of the "Operations Before Charleston" show a plantation and gardens that fit the descriptions of the Gibbes property.

British troops landed at Gibbes' Ashley River landing and the farm

became a military encampment during the attack on the city. The intersection of Grove Plantation Road and the Broad Road (now King Street) on March 30, 1780, was the scene of the first skirmish between American troops under Col. John Laurens and the frontal units of the British assault forces.

While the precise date of the present house's construction is not certain, the presence of "eared" Georgian mantels in the attic would indicate its date to have been between 1786 and 1790. The house is specifically mentioned in a land transfer in 1798 when it was sold by John Beaufain Irving to Mary Clodner Vesey, the purchaser being described as a "free East Indian."

That property transfer cites "the tenement dwelling house," the term "tenement" then usually denoting a rental property. The property was listed as "Wedderburn Lodge," indicating there was a house on the site.

Subsequent owners remodelled the interior in the Regency Style and added the front portico with its ground-level Gothic arches.

In 1901-02, the house was used as the Women's Building of the South Carolina Interstate and West Indian Exposition, the main buildings of which were in what is now Hampton Park.

President Theodore Roosevelt was guest of honor at a reception at Lowndes Grove during the exposition.