

THE WIGG FAMILY HAS A HISTORY AT OLDFIELD

In 1663, King Charles II of England signed the first Charter for the colony of Carolina, granting liberal authority over a gigantic tract of land in the New World to eight of his strongest supporters in his restoration to the Crown after the English Civil War. These eight supporters were the Lords Proprietors of Carolina and were ruling landlords of the colony.¹ The goal of Lords Proprietors was to make a profit by way of an import-export triangular trade route: Rum and slaves from the Caribbean, natural materials from Carolina colony and English manufactured goods. Charleston was founded in 1680, Beaufort in 1711 and Savannah in 1733. All had large, natural harbors; all were destined to become wealthy trade centers. Settlement and population growth in the 18th century, however, remained concentrated close to the coastal cities and river basins.

Sir John Colleton was one of the Lords Proprietors and even while in exile on Barbados was rewarded with a 12,000-acre barony which he never set foot on. His allocation was the land between the May River and the Okatie River. Different maps and documents refer to the area as Colleton Neck, Okeetee Barony and Devil's Elbow Barony.²

Property records show that by 1752 the land that would become the 21st century Oldfield, was owned by Charlestonian Gabriel Manigault. Not surprisingly, he was interested in the land's commercial value rather than settlement. Land use and the economy changed by the time English immigrant William Hazzard arrived. He was a resident of the town of Beaufort, an officer in the colonial militia (Colonel Hazzard) and a wealthy planter with plantation land on Port Royal Island and along the Okatie River.

The Wigg family, also early English settlers in the Beaufort District (early name for Beaufort County), allied themselves with the Hazzards through property, marriage and business partnerships. The first of the Wigg family to immigrate to the New World was Richard Wigg. Richard's son, Edward Wigg, was born in Beaufort in 1715. As an adult, Edward was a merchant and planter, owning a 532-acre plantation on Port Royal Island and a 450-acre plantation on Okatie River. Surviving wills, plat maps and surveys have led historians to believe that the "more than 450-acre Wigg plantation on the Okatie River" was located on the north side of the river, at Wigg's Bluff, present day Camp St. Mary's. Part of that tract includes sections of our Oldfield. Edward married Mary Hazzard in 1738. They had 4 daughters, Sarah, Elizabeth, Mary and Ann and one son, named appropriately, William Hazzard Wigg. The Okatie River plantation became the Wigg family seat but, as was common at the time, successful planter families left daily management of the plantations to land managers while they lived in town.



This Beaufort home, today called the William Wigg Barnwell House was built in 1816 so not enjoyed by Edward but by future Wigg family members.³

ADDITIONALLY

¹ The Proprietors were non-resident business men and had no desire or ability to handle long distant problems like slave insurrections, pirates, attacks from the Spanish at St. Augustine and Indians on the frontier. By 1729 all eight had sold their Carolina rights back to the Crown and by an Act of Parliament, their lands became the Royal Colonies, North Carolina and South Carolina, each with its own crown-appointed governor. South Carolina's first Royal Governor was Robert Johnson. (In 1732, Governor Johnson was granted 8000 acres; the future Oldfield was within that tract, hence our logo with "1732" proudly displayed.)

² Okatie, an Indian name, was spelled phonetically, therefore many different ways, for instance, Okatee, Okeetee, Oketee, Okatie, Oakety or Okety. In our history, Okatie is the name of a river, a colonial barony and one of ten stable communities of the Yamassee Nation. Legal documents, newspapers and personal papers use all of these spellings. Going forward, I will simplify by using the "Okatie" spelling, unless within a direct quotation.

³ As recently as January, 1973, this house was slated for demolition. Through the intervention of Historic Beaufort Foundation several stays were granted and in September, 1973, it was moved from its original location at the southwest corner of Prince and Scott Streets to its present site at 501 King Street. The twelve room town house is said to have been built by the Gibbes brothers on behalf of their sister, Sarah who married William Wigg Barnwell, grandson of the Revolutionary War hero, Major William Hazzard Wigg. During the Civil War, the house

As England and the American Colonies faced off, it was difficult for colonists to remain neutral. In 1775, William Hazzard Wigg was 29 years old. He was a third generation colonist and did not hesitate to take an active part in support of the patriot cause against the aggressions of Great Britain. Wigg bore a commission in the militia of South Carolina while continuing the family tradition of owning and working multiple tracts of land on Port Royal Island and along the Okatie River. Ultimately, Wigg rose to the rank of Major and became a hero for the American cause. In 1781, he was imprisoned in Charleston and his plantations burned by the British. Major Wigg remained a prisoner of the Crown until March, 1782 when he returned to his home in Beaufort District to try to rebuild his life and livelihood.

In April, 1798 Major William Hazzard Wigg, war hero, politician, member of the first board of Beaufort College and member of St. Helena's Episcopal Church, died of pleurisy. His early demise at age 42, was attributed to the harsh conditions of his wartime captivity. His wife, Esther died only months later. William and Esther's only child, William Hutson Wigg was 11 years old when his parents died.

Upon coming of age, William Hudson Wigg inherited all family properties and assets. He had only one child, William Hazzard Wigg II, born in 1809. After his young wife Sarah died in childbirth, he never remarried, living out his life in Beaufort District until his death in 1827. Shortly before his death, a survey shows that he owned 1,945 acres northwest of the Okatie River. The present Oldfield 927-acre tract lies within the very eastern portion of that 1823 documented property.

Sarah and William Hudson Wigg's only son, William Hazzard Wigg II was born at Okatie but by the early 1850's, he moved his family permanently out of South Carolina to Washington D.C. where he was successful in prosecuting the family's posthumous suit brought against the United States of America for the Revolutionary War losses of his grandfather, Major William Hazzard Wigg. The case ⁴ was noteworthy because the plunder of Major Wigg's property "was done in violation of the terms under which Charleston capitulated: That the prisoners under that capitulation should, when paroled, remain in peaceable possession of their property."

Amazingly, after a decade of claim hearings, the "famous Wigg Claim" was settled, awarding the family \$43,000 in damages (that's 1858 dollars!). The question remains, in my mind, since the extraordinarily punitive action was taken by the British against Wigg, why was the claim against the United States Government successful?

served as Union Hospital #4. The house later served as a school and as an apartment house. For the better part of this century it sustained much abuse and neglect. The house was purchased and restored by antiques dealer Jim Williams of Savannah, Georgia of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*-fame.

⁴ The trial document tells that in May, 1781 while Major Wigg was a hostage-of-war, he watched as his brother-in-law was hung and the Major's impassioned speech to citizens of Charleston afterwards resulted in "an extraordinary punitive action." The document went on to describe what then happened. "Immediately after the execution, a special [British] expedition by water, was dispatched with orders to plunder and destroy the property, on his [Wigg's] two plantations lying on the Okeetee River, in St. Luke's parish, Beaufort District. Within a period of about fifteen or twenty days, all the perishable property possessed by Major Wigg was swept away from him. His slaves were sold. His crops were left to waste. His buildings were devoted to the torch. His flocks and his herds were given to the slaughter knife and his horses were carried off to the enemy's lines at Savannah. In short, the plantations which Major Wigg had left flourishing were now converted into a wilderness."