

From: SC News from SCIWAY <sciway-news@sc-news.net>
To: Kester, Tonykester@aging.sc.gov
Date: 3/31/2016 2:37:20 PM
Subject: 20 Years Later: A Salute to the Charleston Navy Base

{ Read this newsletter in your browser }

{ SC's April Calendar + Our Featured SC Event }

April 28 – May 8, 2016 | This year's [April Calendar of Events](#) is brought to you by the [Great County Fair](#), an 11-day event which features daily concerts, amusement rides, an antique tractor quilt displays, laser tag, pig races, a petting zoo, clowns and magicians, and a butterfly garden.

[See all the other great South Carolina events coming up in April.](#)

{ 20 Years Later: A Salute to the Charleston Navy Base }

April 1, 2016 marks the twentieth anniversary of the closing of the [Navy Base in North Charleston](#). The Naval Yard, as it was originally called, was established in 1901 along the west bank of the Cooper River. Officers' quarters were constructed atop the former site of Chicora Park, a public garden developed by the City of Charleston in 1895 and designed by landscape architects John and Frederick Olmsted in 1896. Although this popular park was short-lived, its lush landscaping and curvilinear layout made it one of Charleston's base the loveliest and most unusual in our nation. Here, officers could oversee the city from their hilltop homes, which signified seniority. Other structures followed the turn-of-the-century style, including an imposing Neoclassical power house in 1909 and an elegant Greek Revival building in 1942.



([Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-D4-5796](#))

One of the few remaining images of Chicora Park, a public garden designed by the Olmsted firm in 1896. The park was located along the Cooper River and accessible via a trolley from downtown Charleston. Despite its expense and popularity, the park was sold to the US government within a few years for use as a naval base. In the foreground of the photo above, one can see the [Dead Horse](#)

While it now seems frozen in time, the Navy Base was once the most vibrant economic force in South Carolina. For nearly a century – through World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War – it supplied America with ships and sailors. Over the years, the base became highly known for both its manufacturing of destroyers and its training of nuclear submarine crews. In fact, when Senator [Fritz Hollings](#) announced the base's closure in 1993, it was the third largest naval facility in the United States.

([Brandon Coffey](#) of [Charleston](#), 2016 © Do Not Use Without Written Consent)

This two-story cottage, now called [Quarters F](#), originally housed [Chicora Park's](#) keeper, or caretaker. Dating from 1898, it is the oldest home on the Navy Base. Plans are underway to restore it as a museum site. The home sits on the former site of [Retreat Plantation](#), which in turn became [Chicora Plantation](#). Neighboring [Marshlands Plantation](#) was also part of the government's \$110,000 purchase.

Nevertheless, by 1996 the historic structures that comprise the area stood vacant. Over the decades, investors have tried to reanimate the buildings as businesses – such as a now-closed restaurant in the [Panama House](#) known as [Quarters K](#) – but by and large, the old homes stand in various states of abandonment and decay. Efforts at large-scale residential redevelopment have also failed, notably after the foreclosure of the [Noisette Company](#), which hoped to restore and sell the quarters alongside new homes of similar style. Even with the former base's proximity to [Riverfront](#) redevelopment has not yet met with success.

([Brandon Coffey](#) of Charleston © 2016)

The Admiral's House – officially called Quarters A – was built in 1905. Before its completion, the Admiral, also known as the Commandant, lived in the Keeper's Cottage, or Quarters F. Quarters A is one of the most endangered properties on the old Navy Base, and it is currently unsafe for occupancy. Estimates to refurbish it range in the neighborhood of \$3 million, and the capital to invest in this is not available at this time.

Fortunately, the beauty of this area still inspires hopes of restoration. The City of [North Charleston](#) fought to rescue the homes from the state, which plans to build an intermodal railway nearby. In a land swap, the city was able to salvage all of the buildings in the Historic Officers' District, and release a master plan for their conservation and renewal later this year. An initial triumph has been the renovation and relocation of the [Eternal Father of the Sea](#) chapel, which had been decimated by a fire and stood in the path of the future train. The Charleston Naval Complex Redevelopment Authority owns the building, was able to renovate and relocate the old church. It now stands near the quarters, where it can serve as an event site.

([Brandon Coffey of Charleston](#), 2016 © Do Not Use Without Written Consent)
Built in 1942, the Eternal Father of the Sea represents the base's biggest restoration effort so far. The chapel served members of the Navy and surrounding community before the base closed. The congregation – God's True Deliverance Church – later made use of the sanctuary, remaining open until 2004. The building then became a performance venue for the North Charleston Arts Festival. Extensive termite damage halted its use in 2005. Fully restored, the chapel has been relocated and now rests near the Historic Officers' Quarters District.

The city hopes to expand upon this theme and create a conference and wedding destination district. Quarters K recently underwent upgrades and is now open for events, and efforts to restore Quarters L should begin within the next month. The ultimate dream is to develop at least two breakfast inns on site. Couples can say their vows in the old chapel and then celebrate with the inns in a collection of historic homes tucked beneath live oaks that once lined the paths of Chicora Park.

([Brandon Coffey of Charleston](#), 2016 © Do Not Use Without Written Consent)
Quarters C, now owned by North Charleston, is another example of a successful rehabilitation within the former base. It was restored in 2013 by a nonprofit group called South Carolina Skills Training which has also restored Quarters Y and Quarters Z. Founded in 2006, the group is comprised of former convicts and substance addicts who are taught employable skills and are also required to take the GED in order to earn a high school diploma. The program is modeled after the successful Street Foundation in San Francisco. Residents live on the top floor and the bottom is rented out for office space.

Regardless of what happens to the old base, in our minds the real success story is the fortitude of the Charleston area, which thrives despite the fact that more than 22,000 jobs were lost during that time years ago. In large part, this has been thanks to burgeoning shipping and aviation industries, and the intrinsic natural beauty of a place that so many value and want to visit. The balance of forces – industrial and environmental – is never easy, and we applaud the City of North Charleston working towards a plan that preserves at least one small corner of our community's culture.

([Brandon Coffey of Charleston](#), 2016 © Do Not Use Without Written Consent)
Built in 1909, this imposing Neoclassical blonde-brick building once housed the base's Central Plant. Unmatched in grandeur, it stands as a striking oddity – by far the most prominent architecturally captivating building in the industrial district. The plant was owned by North Charleston until a land swap between the city and state saw it change hands. Palmetto Railways plans to build an intermodal railway complex near the historic structure, but fortunately, there are no plans to tear it down.

