



Discover American Life & Labor at Chicora Wood: A Lightning Lesson from Teaching with Historic Place



(C. N. Bayless)

Spanning 250 years, from the English settlement of the Virginia Colony until the American Civil War, the ruling classes of North America's eastern territories used different forms of legal slavery to produce cash crops on large pieces of land. In the 17th century, enslaved Africans and European indentured servants worked side-by-side. In the 18th century, American slavery evolved into racialized caste system. Enslaved Africans and their descendants were legally a class of enslaved labor by the Revolution. This system supported plantations that produced valuable cotton, rice, indigo, and sugar. These goods traveled the globe, making a portion of the world's population very wealthy at the expense of human suffering and exploitation.

In Georgetown County, South Carolina, plantation owners used fertile land and labor to produce rice. The rice plantation owners bought Africans who were skilled in rice production. South Carolina became the nation's leading rice producer between the 1750s and the late 1860s. This economic success was largely earned through the work of the large enslaved population.

Chicora Wood was a rice plantation where hundreds of enslaved people lived and worked, from the 1730s until the Civil War. Enslaved Africans and their descendants cleared woods, cultivated and harvested rice, and constructed homes for their enslavers, the Allston family. By the mid-1800s, their labor made Chicora Wood one of the most profitable businesses in South Carolina and made the Allstons very wealthy.



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Where this lesson fits into the curriculum

Time Period: 1750s - 1860s

Topics: This lesson could be used in units on labor history and enslavement, as well in units on the antebellum South.

Relevant United States History Standards for Grades 5-12

This lesson relates to the following [National Standards for History from the UCLA National Center for History in the Schools](#)

US History Era 2

- **Standard 2C:** The student understands social and cultural change in British America.
- **Standard 3A:** The student understands colonial economic life and labor systems in the Americas.
- **Standard 3B:** The student understands economic life and the development of labor systems in the English colonies.
- **Standard 3C:** The student understands African life under slavery

US History Era 4

- **Standard 2D:** The student understands the rapid growth of "the peculiar institution" after 1800 and the varied experiences of African Americans under slavery.
- **Standard 3A:** The student understands the changing character of American political life in "the age of the common man."

US History Era 5

- **Standard 1A:** The student understands how the North and South differed and how politics and ideologies led to the Civil War.
- **Standard 2A:** The student understands how the resources of the Union and Confederacy affected the course of the war.

Relevant Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

This lesson relates to the following Curriculum Standards for Social Studies from the National Council for the Social Studies:

Theme I: Culture; Standard B

Theme II: Time, Continuity and Change; Standard D

Theme III: People, Places and Environments; Standard E

Theme VII: Production, Distribution, and Consumption; Standards A, E, I

Theme VIII: Science, Technology, and Society; Standard C



Relevant Common Core Standards

This lesson relates to the following Common Core English and Language Arts Standards for History and Social Studies for middle school and high school students:

Key Ideas and Details

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.2
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.3

Craft and Structure

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.5
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.6

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.7

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.10



About This Lesson

This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration files "[Georgetown County Rice Culture, c. 1750-c. 1910](#)"

[<http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/64500563.pdf>] and "[Chicora Wood Plantation](#)" [<http://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/a5fbc1b2-597a-4f92-b227-274b8e72d39c/>] (with [photographs](#) [<http://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/6a13ccc8-a53b-4203-aa1a-30eb16b6e5a1>]) as well as other source materials on the rice culture of Georgetown County.

This lesson was written by Lauren Rever, a public historian and history interpreter. It was edited by Teaching with Historic Places staff. This lesson is one in a series that brings the important stories of historic places into classrooms across the country.

Objectives

1. To explain the connection between forced labor of African Americans and prosperity for European Americans;
2. To list the ways the Allston family made rice production at Chicora Wood Plantation exceptionally profitable;
3. To identify exploitative systems of labor in present day nations and present research on one or more of those systems.

Materials for students

The materials listed below can either be used directly on the computer or can be printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students.

1. One map of the region and plantation sites;
2. Two readings about daily life on a plantation and the impact of rice production on enslaved African Americans;
3. Two photographs showing work sites on Chicora Wood Plantation

About the Site

Chicora Wood plantation is a private residence and are not open to the public. Contact the [Rice Museum](#) in Georgetown for more information on the history of rice production.



Getting Started

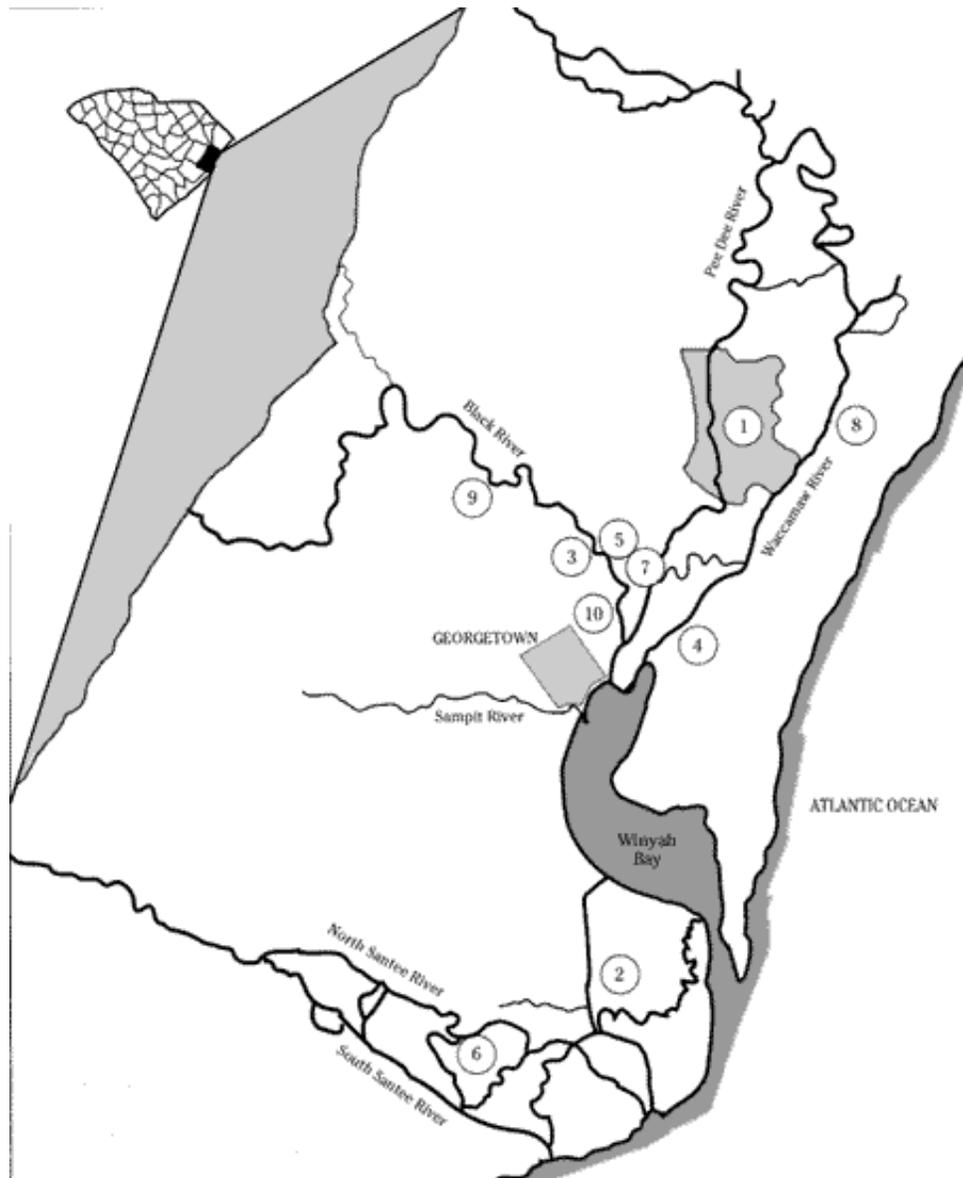
Who built America?

What historic place might you study to answer this question?



Locating the Site

Map 1: Plantation Sites in Georgetown County, South Carolina



By the 1770s the introduction of a new method of rice cultivation in river swamps fed by tides resulted in significant increases in quality and production of the crop. The Georgetown County land was particularly suited for the tidal swamp method of rice planting because of its intricate river system. Later, enslaved workers built irrigation systems to flood rice fields. The rivers connected the rice plantations to markets in major ports.



Key for Map 1

Historic Properties in Georgetown County

1. Pee Dee River Rice Planters' Historic District, including:
 - a) Hasty Point Rice Barn
 - b) Exchange Plantation
 - c) Rosebank Plantation House
 - d) Chicora Wood Plantation
 - e) Arundel Plantation
 - f) Dirleton Plantation House
2. Belle Island Rice Mill Chimney, Cat Island
3. Beneventum Plantation House
4. Fairfield Rice Mill Chimney
5. Keithfield Plantation
6. Milldam Rice Mill and Rice Barn
7. Nightingale Hall Rice Mill Chimney
8. Richmond Hill Plantation Archeological Sites
9. Rural Hall Plantation House
10. Weehaw Rice Mill Chimney



Questions for Map 1

1) Locate the area containing Chicora Wood Plantation. What do all the rice plantation sites have in common? Why do you think this is?

2) Study the names of the natural features and the names of the plantation sites. Based on the names and titles, what culture or cultures do you think were present in the region?



Determining the Facts

Reading 1: Labor and Production on Chicora Wood Plantation

Chicora Wood was a rice plantation in Georgetown County, South Carolina, owned by the European American Allston family. The Allstons chose to invest in slave labor to start their rice business in the 1730s. Before this region was colonized by Europeans, the land was forested and settled by the Catawba, Cherokee, Chicora, Edisto, Pee Dee, and Santee tribes. After the land was claimed by Britain, the Allstons purchased it and brought enslaved laborers with them. The laborers cleared the woods, developed rice fields, and built European-style homes, fences, and barns. Chicora Wood reigned as one of the most profitable businesses in South Carolina over the next century.

The enslaved men and women at Chicora Wood produced 840,000 pounds of rice in 1850 and, by 1860, that number nearly doubled to 1,500,000 pounds. As a result, owner Robert Allston was one of the richest people in the United States at the start of the Civil War. He was also the ninth largest slave owner. While production doubled between 1850 and 1860, Allston increased the number of his enslaved workforce at Chicora Wood from 401 to 631.

The 631 enslaved people worked in every aspect of plantation life at Chicora Wood. A cooper named Sam made three or more barrels a day to hold rice. A nurse named Racheal cared for the Allston children. A carpenter named Tom built buildings, fences, and wagons. A cook named Amy prepared the Allston's meals. A young boy named James lived off-site as an apprentice to a shoemaker. Most of the 631 people enslaved by Allston, however, labored in rice production.

At a plantation, rice was farmed in large amounts to sell across the country. During harvest season, overseers required enslaved workers to break up to one-thirtieth of an acre of rice land per day, all by hand. At other times of the year, laborers were made to dig trenches used to flood rice fields.

This forced labor system grew for almost 100 years before Robert Allston inherited Chicora Wood in 1827. Along with the means for rice production, the plantation owner also "inherited" 90 enslaved individuals between 1819 and 1840. Passing a property's enslaved workers to new owners strengthened the idea that enslaved African Americans' natural role was to submit as property and labor on the land. Allston increased his means for production by buying more enslaved workers. He knew that any child born into slavery would remain his property. In Allston's eyes, he was courteous for keeping families together. He owned enough human chattel to manage seven plantation sites in 1860.

In the 1830s Allston bought a steam-powered mill at Chicora Wood to clean rice more efficiently. This meant enslaved workers had to clear more land and harvest more rice to keep up with the machine. However, records of torture, refusal to work quickly, and slave revolts show the enslaved individuals on Chicora Wood pushed back against their oppressors. For example, in 1864, an enslaved man listed only as "Stephen the Valet" escaped the Allstons' forced labor. Stephen's parents, Mary and James, were jailed in isolation. The Allstons retaliated against them for their son's escape.

After emancipation, some freed people left Georgetown County. Others remained, hoping to make a paid living using their skills in agriculture. After decades of soaring profit at the expense of human lives, rice production in Georgetown County dropped. Production in the county fell from 54 million pounds in 1860 to six million pounds in 1870. By the 1930s, Robert Allston's daughter ended rice production at Chicora Wood. Having belonged to one of the richest families in the country, she claimed was too expensive to repair and clear the land.



Questions for Reading 1

- 1) What kinds of work did enslaved residents do at Chicora Wood? Who benefited from this labor? How did they benefit?

- 2) What were the factors that contributed to the increase in rice production from 840,000 pounds to 1.5 million pounds at Chicora Wood in the mid to late 1800s?

- 3) Robert Allston owned Chicora Wood, Exchange Plantation, Rosebank Plantation, Nightingale Plantation, and several other sites in South Carolina and North Carolina. How do you think he managed so many sites?

- 4) What kinds of jobs do you think were available to European Americans living in plantation regions? Hint: Consider the goods and services that were likely *not* supplied by slave labor and plantation-owning families. Why do you think so? Use evidence from the reading and the map to support your answer.



Determining the Facts

Reading 2: Letters to the Allstons about the work of an enslaved youth, James, 1817-1819

The following are two letters the Allston family's business advisor, Charles Kershaw, wrote to the Allstons. James was a young enslaved boy owned by Benjamin Allston, Robert's father. James was one of sixteen enslaved people that 18-year-old Robert Allston inherited in 1819 after Benjamin Allston died.

Charleston December 30, 1817

Your Servants have been on board Capt Tobeys Schooner several days. Mr Black complains much of James being very Idle, this is the last Year and the time when he should exert himself to be a good Workman, but he will not do what is proper, Mr Black says that he is capable of finishing Six pair of Shoes a Week and he seldom does more than three....

Charleston 8th February 1819

... Mr Black says he [James] is a good Workman and capable of turning out work equal to any of his Colour, but he is so very indolent that he requires a very tight hand kept over him, if therefore you consent to hire James to Mr Black you must give him a complete command over him and let him know no other person to apply to, but I assure [you] after all it will be more to your Son Roberts Interest to put him in the Field, he will earn more than double what he will do in this place.

James may perhaps go on very well with Mr Black for a few Months, but after that he will have bad notions put into his head, he will want to work out and pay Wages which is much the same as giving him his freedom, I have had several young Lads whom I put apprentice but the moment they got out of their time they began upon the plan I mentioned of wanting to work out and pay Wages, which I found was one dollar or two dollars a Month and sometimes nothing, I therefore was compelled to send them in the Country and put them in the Field.

All that I can do is to receive the Wages from Mr Black, if you think proper to hire him on the terms mentioned, but if you was to hint to him that I have any thing to say in the Business, you may be assured, James will not be obedient or attentive to his Work.



Visual Evidence

Photos 1 & 2: Two dependencies on Chicora Wood: Rice Mill (top) and Kitchen (bottom)



(C. N. Bayless)

Enslaved workers at Chicora Wood planted, harvested, and then thrashed rice. To thrash rice is to separate the grain from the stalks. Then, they pounded the husks from the grain. They did this by hand until the 1830s, when steam-powered threshing and pounding mills like the one shown in Photo 1 became common. Fires were kept to generate the steam to power the mill.



(C. N. Bayless)

Kitchens were kept separate from the main plantation house to prevent fire.



Questions for Photos 1 & 2:

- 1) List the types of labor enslaved people performed in each building. Identify where in each photo this work would be done.

- 2) Use reading 1 to list other possible types of buildings on the planation. What types of labor would enslaved people perform there?

- 3) The Chicora Wood Plantation and its slave-labor system operated from the 1730s to the Civil War. The Allstons introduced new technologies like irrigation, running water, electricity, and the rice mill over time. Consider your own times and list three new technologies from the past 50 years that are used in factories or businesses. How does one of the technologies support the success of the business? Who uses the tool and how does it make the job easier for them?



Putting it all Together:

The following activities will help students communicate what they learned from the lesson about historic preservation and history, and to connect this lesson to labor on a local and global scale.

Activity 1: Reclaiming History on Chicora Wood

Historians do not have many documents or historic sites about enslaved individuals. Documents that do exist are usually written from the perspective of white owners and deal with economic matters instead of personal or human ones. Often, only the main house was preserved on former plantations. While the historical record cannot fully paint the complex lives of enslaved individuals, we know these people lived lives filled with love, pain, and a longing for freedom, simply because we are all human.

Have students research how cultural institutions recall, preserve, and honor the lives of individuals for whom they have very little primary evidence (examples below). Then, instruct students to pick one piece of evidence from this lesson and use it to design an art project to remember and honor the individuals enslaved at Chicora Wood and in Georgetown County.

Students can produce a poem, picture book, or art piece. Ask students to use their piece of evidence and think about color, word choice, and perspective. Ask, how would you make sure somebody in the future knows the enslaved individuals were more than property and labor? After the activity, you may want to display the students' work in the hallway or at a parent-teacher night.

Note: American historic sites that explore new ways to study the lives of enslaved people include National Parks, James Madison's Montpelier, George Washington's Mt. Vernon, the Library of Congress, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the Whitney Plantation in Louisiana.

- Take an account of an enslaved person's birth, marriage, or movement written by an enslaver and retelling the account from the perspective of an enslaved person.
- Record oral histories of decedents of enslaved people and preserve their memories.
- Use art to portray enslaved people in the fullness of their lives. Show them in loving moments such as going to church or hugging a friend and in moments of struggle, such as being separated from family at an auction or working in a field.
- Preserve "witness trees," trees that are old enough to have witnessed and provided shade to enslaved people living nearby.
- Base tours and history on the [recorded testimonies](#) of people born into slavery.
- Prioritize the history of the enslaved laborers as above or equally important to the historical experiences of the European Americans at the site



Activity 2: Industry and Labor in Your Area

Different societies will use different methods and systems to cultivate wealth or food from any given landscape. Before the Allstons settled in South Carolina, the French and Spanish colonists in the Southeastern United States used the land on Georgetown County differently. The indigenous Chicora, Pee Dee, and Waccamaw Indian tribes farmed the land in South Carolina for many hundreds of years before the Europeans arrived. Each culture brought its own hierarchies, priorities, and traditions to how they organized work and reward.

Have students explore industry and economy in their own region, and then ask them to present their findings to the class. You may ask them to give an oral presentation, write a skit that demonstrates their knowledge of historical labor practices, or describe their subject on a poster board. They can work individually or in groups.

First, ask your students what industries are common in your region. Where do people work and what do they produce? What is your region known for, historically? Divide students into groups to research diverse historic industries in your region at a historical society, library, university, or online. Consider dividing students into groups based on time period, type of industry, or type of peoples.

Next, have your students log on to the National Park Service website and identify historic places associated with the regional economy by searching the [National Register of Historic Places database](#). For example, historic mines and mining towns or historic farms will be on the National Register. Historic factories are also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These places may be used for other purposes now, but the NR documentation will provide their historical significance.

After your class completes the information-gathering portion of this activity, have each group use its images, notes, and observations to design a poster or slide-show presentation about the types of industries that once supported your community.

Remind students that not all industries followed the wage-earning production system common today. Provide your students with the following research questions to focus their presentation:

- Who labored here? Was there a wage-system?
- What did their labor produce? How were the products used? How were they distributed?
- What natural resources did they need? What non-natural resources did they need?
- Was the labor system egalitarian? Community-based? Did anyone control the business?
- Were there any disputes between laborers and owners?
- Did any ways of using land, people's labor, or ways of thinking about goods and services surprise you?



Activity 3: Mapping Global Labor Practices

Now that your students have looked at 19th century rice production, have students study contemporary economies and labor. Your students can research and map labor practices across the globe using the CIA's World Factbook online data and analysis: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xx.html>. Students will need paper, pencils, and internet access to complete this task.

First, assign each student a nation and explain that they will identify the industries and economy in that nation by summarizing the data (numbers) and analysis (language) provided by the CIA World Factbook.

For example, the student assigned to Afghanistan will write that 44.3% of employed Afghans are involved in agriculture, 18.1% are involved in industrial goods production, and 37.6% provide services. More than half of Afghans live in poverty. The nation is the world's leading producer of poppies for widely illegal opium drugs. Because of poverty and illicit economies, the country is challenged by corruption, gang violence, and money laundering.

After summarizing their nation's economy from the Factbook, ask students to look at other reliable sources. Use content offered online from the United Nations (such as the International Labour Organization) and the United States Department of Labor's Bureau of International Labor Affairs. Journalism reports from newspapers of record may also be used.

On a separate sheet of paper, students must answer the following questions:

- What system of government does this nation have? How does it support the economic system? Do you think it has a lot of control over the nation's economy?
- Who invests in this nation's economy? Local investors or foreign?
- Does this nation have a high or low standard of living? What factors do you look at to determine the high or low standard?
- What do the laborers produce? What is the product in demand? What price does it go for?
- What labor struggles exist in this nation? When employees speak up against unjust practices, what do they protest?

Research sites to use include:

- [Business Human Rights](#)
- [United Nations Global Compact](#),
- [International Labour Organization](#)
- [Institute for Agriculture & Trade Policy](#)

Finally, facilitate a class discussion where students compare and contrast the lives and labor of the people in the nations they studied with the American plantation economic system. Remember to emphasize that the specific time and experiences of the enslaved people at Chicora Wood (and Antebellum Slavery broadly) were specific, but we may also gain perspective on contemporary labor and exploitation by studying the past.



References and Endnotes

Reading 1

Reading 1 was compiled from Nancy R. Ruhf, "Chicora Wood Plantation" (Columbia, South Carolina), National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1972; from J. Tracy Power and Sherry Piland, "Georgetown County Rice Culture, c. 1750-c. 1910" (Columbia, South Carolina) National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1987; from Judith Carney, "Rice, Slaves, and Landscapes of Cultural Memory," *Places of Cultural Memory: African Reflections on the American Landscape*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2001; and J. H. Easterby, *The South Carolina Rice Plantation: As Revealed in the Papers of Robert F.W. Allston* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946).

Reading 2

Reading two was compiled from primary sources in J. H. Easterby, *The South Carolina Rice Plantation: As Revealed in the Papers of Robert F.W. Allston* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946).



Additional Resources

Discover Chicora Wood, a Lightning Lesson about Forced Labor on a South Carolina Rice Plantation examines forced labor on a plantation site as well as the effects of the efficient economic system on enslavers and enslaved. Below are materials for further exploration of enslavement, as well as information about the American Indian groups in Georgetown County.

Narratives of Enslavement

The Library of Congress: Voices from the Days of Slavery

The American Folklife Center houses almost [seven hours of recorded interviews](#) of formerly enslaved individuals taken between 1932 and 1975. [See the faces](#) of seven individuals as they describe being a slave and becoming free.

National Endowment for the Humanities: EDSITEMent!

The NEH offers an [education guide](#) containing vetted resources for teaching African American history, including life under slavery, free black people, and resistance to slavery.

Sites of Slavery

The Whitney Plantation

The [Whitney Plantation](#) is the only plantation to interpret their site solely through the lens of slavery and enslavement. Their site contains videos, lesson plans, primary sources, and photos about the transatlantic slave trade, plantation landscapes and daily life, artwork, and first-person slave narratives.

James Madison’s Montpelier: “The Mere Distinction of Colour”

Over 300 enslaved individuals lived at Montpelier. The [Montpelier website](#) shares oral histories from the active descendent community, archaeological discoveries, and an award-winning exhibit titled “The Mere Distinction of Colour” to tell the complex story of freedom and enslavement while working for the framer of the Constitution.

Modern Day Slavery

Students Opposing Slavery – President Lincoln’s Cottage

The National Trust for Historic Preservation site, President Lincoln’s Cottage, supports [Students Opposing Slavery](#). SOS is an educational program aimed to raise awareness of human trafficking and empower young leaders to end modern day slavery.

Current & Historic Tribal Communities

As of 2018 there are eight state-recognized tribes in South Carolina: Catawba Indian Nation, Beaver Creek Indians, Edisto Natchez Kusso Tribe, Pee Dee Indian Nation, the Piedmont American Indian Association, Santee Indians, Sumter Tribe, and the Waccamaw. Many live in or near Georgetown County. Other native communities, such as Chicora, exist separate to this designation.

Pee Dee Indian Tribe

The Pee Dee Indian Tribe focuses on advocating, educating, and empowering the next generation of Pee Dee and other American Indian groups. One [website](#) contains information about the Pee Dee tribal government as well as their Tribal history.

Waccamaw Indian People

The [Waccamaw website](#) contains current events, an essay collection about the Waccamaw Indians, and interviews with Chief Hatcher.

Catawba Tribe

The [Catawba Cultural Preservation website](#) provides information about Tribal history, events and programs, and information about the cultural center.

