

# International Partnership Tells Story of Carolina–Barbados Connection

The same wind that blows through Barbados also blows through South Carolina. Passing through the balustrade verandas of handsome Barbadian homes, the tropical gusts continue across the sunlit Caribbean for two thousand miles to the Carolina coast, connecting the two lands like an invisible umbilical cord.



Woman Emerging, Justin Marcee

Insofar as Charleston is the daughter of Barbados, the resemblance between the two is close to being one that many would call a "spitting image."

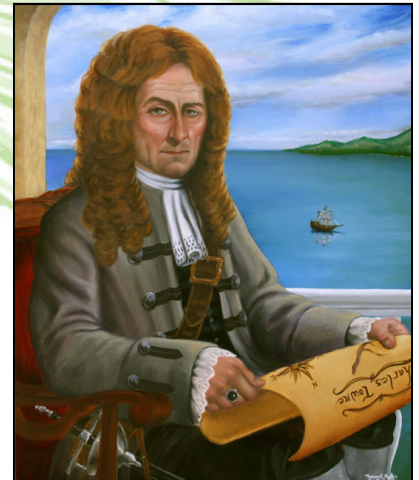
Barbadian native Rhoda Green said that the similarities of Charleston to her home country were among the reasons she moved there. "When I first came to Charleston," she explained, "I was struck by the number of aspects that reminded me of Barbados—the parish churches, the names of people, the architecture. It was so much like where I grew up."

These similarities between Barbados and South Carolina are the focus of a traveling art and history exhibit jointly sponsored by the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor and the Barbados Ministry of Tourism. Highlighting the "international connection" in a new and innovative way, the exhibit marks the first time that a congressionally designated National Heritage Area has pushed beyond its borders to partner with another country in a project of this magnitude. In doing so, both places—South Carolina and Barbados—are afforded a more complete understanding of their own pasts while also benefitting from the positive economic impact that such a heightened awareness about the connection brings.

The shared history of the two places can be traced back more than three centuries, when Barbados, in a sense, gave birth to the new colony. In 1670, a group of planters and slaves set sail from Speightstown in the Barbadian parish of St. Peter and landed at Albemarle Point on South Carolina's Ashley River, establishing Charles Towne on behalf of England. Within a matter of three years, more than half of the white settlers and enslaved Africans arriving in the new settlement came from Barbados.

They brought with them a successful colonial model that shaped the social and economic future of South Carolina for centuries to come. The most notable Barbadian import was the plantation system, which provided for the successful sustainability of the colony, eventually making it the wealthiest of England's colonies in America.

The political influence of the Barbadians is evidenced in the government structure as well as the leadership that emerged from the island. Seven of the first twenty-one governors were either Barbadian or had Barbadian ties, and the names of many of the wealthy Barbadian émigrés continue to dominate the Carolina coast today—Drayton, Middleton, Yeamans, and Gibbes.



Major Stede Bonnet, Pirate by Thomas Kelly Pauley

The Caribbean influence on Carolinian architecture and city layout is still evident today. Charleston, for example, was designed in a similar fashion to Bridgetown in Barbados, with broad central avenues and ordered residential and commercial blocks. The "single house" design that is so common in Charleston was adopted from the Barbadian design of building long, narrow homes with gables on one side for the purpose of catching the breeze on hot days. The colorful pastel palette that gives Charleston its muted rainbow look is another Caribbean inheritance.



Regal Dwelling by Neville Legall

"Every strand of the social fabric of the Carolinas has some sort of genesis in Barbados," said Rhoda Green, who was recently appointed as an Honorary Counsel for Barbados in South Carolina.

"I remember hearing for the first time the Gullah dialect [in Charleston] and realizing how, in many regards, it is so similar to the Bajan dialect of the Barbadians—the syntax, the way they form their sentences. It's very easy to see the commonalities."

Attempting to promote the Carolina-Caribbean connection, a group called the Carolina Caribbean Association, led by Green, formed and successfully led the movement for the "twinning" ceremonies of Charleston and Speightstown in 1997. This began a dialogue about the connection that has gained momentum over the years but has heretofore remained outside the collective consciousness.

It wasn't until the Charles Towne Landing State Historic Site (an official Discovery Site of the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor), recently began to build its interpretive center and take as a focus the connection to Barbados that the connection caught the attention of Michelle McCollum, executive director of the Corridor.

"The connection [of South Carolina to Barbados] is obviously there, but it's not a part of our history that is commonly known," she said. "The more I thought about it, the more I realized that this project was something that the Corridor could and should take on."

Bound at one end by the Blue Ridge Mountains and at the other by the port of Charleston, the S.C. National Heritage Corridor includes historic, cultural, and natural resources that tell the story of the state's centuries-long evolution and culture, which has been undeniably influenced by Barbados.

Visits were made back and forth by Corridor officials and representatives from the Barbados Ministry of Tourism, and countless conference calls were held. It was decided that instead of a single-site exhibit, the project should be a traveling, juried art show, comprising pieces from both South Carolinian and Barbadian artists, which would be on display throughout the Corridor as well as in the Barbados.



One Row Over From the Last by Jeffrey Callaham

“This partnership between the Corridor and Barbados is a way for us not only to preserve and promote our connected past, it is a partnership that also has the potential to economically benefit both areas.”

Michelle McCollum, SC Heritage Corridor Executive Director

Melding history and different forms of art, the exhibit in its entirety offers, according to McCollum, "a way for people to emotionally make the connection." Through artwork, musical performances, theatrical performances and foodways demonstrations all held in conjunction with the art exhibit in each participating community, participants can see, touch, hear and taste the linkages. For many, the exhibit “creates an “ah-ha” moment when they come to understand that many things woven into our southern culture are actually part of Barbadian fabric”.

Artwork was solicited in five different categories—architecture, agriculture, West African influence, arts, and maritime—and the pieces that the call spawned varied from paintings of sugarcane farms to photographs of tropical plants to pottery featuring ocean-like details.

Marcelo Novo, a Columbia, S.C.–based artist with Latin American roots, chose to represent in three separate multi-media pieces the voyage from Barbados to Charleston. One of his pieces, called "Journey," depicts a map of coastal South Carolina on one side and a collage of actual Barbadian stamps in another corner, with a ship traveling northwest toward the Carolinas.

Lance Anderson's paintings depicted historical scenes that spoke to the connection. One of his works, "Charlestown 1670," features the arrival of settlers to the Carolina coast from Barbados, and another features, as he explained, "a scene of contrasting black societies within the Charleston environment" against the backdrop of the South Carolina Interstate West Indian Exposition of 1902.

The exhibit also included a series of historical panels that not only outlines the conjoining histories of South Carolina and the Barbados but also the shared traditions of the two lands that are still present today.

Another facet of the partnership was the idea of an International Heritage Development Symposium, planned for October 2008, that will bring together parties from South Carolina and Barbados in an effort to bridge the distance between the two places and bring to life the international connection.

McCollum explained, "We didn't want to do a traditional exhibit that was forgotten as soon as the artwork was packed away. We wanted an added “oomph” that would make it something special and create an economic impact. That's where the idea of taking the exhibit to Barbados and having the symposium came from."

The symposium will provide a forum for scholars, tourism officials, and other interested individuals to network and more fully discuss the common past and culture of the two places. Workshops will be held that will highlight agriculture/horticulture, West African influences, historic sites, genealogy, and nature-based tourism, led by teams of experts in the respective fields.

For more information on the connection between Barbados and South Carolina, visit Charlestowne Landing State Historic Site, or [www.sc-heritagecorridor.org](http://www.sc-heritagecorridor.org). For additional information for the trip bound for the island of Barbados, email Elizabeth Harm at [eharm@scprt.com](mailto:eharm@scprt.com) to be added to the distribution list.

