



Hampton National Historic Site

History



“The General’s lands are very well cultivated... his cattle, sheep, horses, etc., of a superior sort, and in much finer condition than many I saw in America. He is very famous for race horses and usually keeps three or four such horses in training, and what enables him to do this is that he owns very extensive iron works, or otherwise he could not.”

English Visitor Richard Parkinson, 1805.

Most people today know Hampton as a sedate Georgian mansion, elegantly furnished and settled amid gardens and shade trees. Built as a country seat just after the Revolutionary War by a prominent Maryland family, the house and its immediate surroundings are just a remnant of the Hampton estate of the early 1800s.



Take a moment to stand at an upstairs window and look out over the lawns, suburban houses, and woodlands. In its heyday Hampton covered this land and more; Ridgely property equaled half the area of present-day Baltimore, land that made its owners rich through iron production, agriculture, and investments. Hampton is the story of a family business, early American industry, and commerce, the cultural tastes of the times, the deprivations of war, and the economic and moral changes that finally made this kind of life obsolete.

Most importantly, Hampton is the story of its people. Scenes from Hampton’s past include a colonial merchant shipper amassing thousands of acres of property along Maryland’s Chesapeake shore; indentured servants casting molten iron into cannons and ammunition for the Revolutionary army; enslaved people loading barrels of grain, iron, and timber onto merchant ships bound for Europe that would return with fine wines and luxury goods.

Later scenes show a powerful businessman and politician well-known as “a very gentell man...said to keep the best table in America”;; a teenaged girl making a list of Christmas gifts to her father’s slaves, carefully noting full names, births, and deaths; 20th century descendants hoping to keep the estate in the family by selling off parcels of land, opening a dairy supplying milk to local schools, and pressing apples into cider.

Today, as you explore Hampton, keep these people in mind. A wealth of artifacts and scenery recreates a world where, for the better part of three centuries, a community of hundreds of individuals played out the comedies and dramas of their own lives against the backdrop of America's development as a nation.

A PALACE IN THE WILDERNESS

In 1875 a journalist chronicled the mansion's beginnings: "The country-people soon saw with amazement what was to them a palace rising in the wilderness... They called it 'Ridgely's Folly.'" Built between 1783 and 1790, Captain Charles Ridgely's dwelling rose with the new nation, yet was modeled after the aristocratic homes of another place and time. Castle Howard in Yorkshire, England, with its large octagonal cupola, may have inspired Ridgely's vision of his country residence; the Captain claimed kinship with the owners of that English estate through his mother's family.

Hampton did not have a formal architect; the master carpenter, Jehu Howell, is credited with much of the design. Local craftsmen, slaves, and indentured servants provided the labor. Hampton Mansion reflects classic Georgian symmetry: a large three-story structure connected to smaller wings on either side by hallways, or hyphens. The exterior is constructed of stone quarried on Ridgely property, stuccoed over and scored to resemble blocks of limestone. The pinkish color comes from iron oxide in the stuccoing compound.

In keeping with its role as a symbol of wealth and power, the mansion had large and lavish rooms where the Ridgelys indulged their taste--and the national obsession--for the styles of ancient Greece and Rome. The set of Baltimore-made painted furniture in the drawing room, purchased in 1832 by John and Eliza Ridgely, re-

fects this classical influence, as do many other chairs, tables, sofas, and decorative items. Later owners ushered in the Victorian mode, the Music Room displays furnishings accumulated by several generations of Ridgelys.



The 19th century brought the exterior to its fullest glory. Italianate gardens set on terraced earthworks were in place by 1802 on the south side of the mansion, while on the north side lay an English-style landscaped park. In the 1830s and 1840s, John and Eliza Ridgely carefully enhanced the "natural" landscape with exotic trees, including the cedar of Lebanon on the south lawn reported to have made its way from the Middle East in a shoebox. In 1839, horticulturist Henry Winthrop Sargent mused that Hampton's "venerable appearance" and "foreign air...quite disturb one's ideas of republican America."

THE SIX MASTERS OF HAMPTON

A HAMPTON CHRONOLOGY



By family custom, the Hampton estate belonged to the eldest son in each generation. Captain Charles Ridgely, 1733--1790, supplied iron implements, arms, and ammunition, and privateers to the Patriots during the Revolutionary War. His merchant fleet helped to establish Baltimore as a major port. Known as "The Builder," he died soon after the mansion was completed.

1695: Henry Darnall, cousin of Lord Baltimore, is granted the Hampton property.

1745: Colonel Charles Ridgely buys 1,500 acres of Northampton from Darnall's daughter, Ann Hill. He expands his holdings to 11,000 acres.

1760: Charles Ridgely, Jr., known as the Captain, receives Northampton tract from his father. Colonel Ridgely, with sons Charles and John, establishes ironworks on a tributary of the Gunpowder River.

1775--83. Revolutionary War. Ridgely ironworks supply arms and implements to the Patriot cause.

1783: Captain Ridgely begins construction of mansion. Ridgely holdings grow to 24,000 acres.

1790: Captain's nephew Charles Carnan Ridgely inherits 12,000 acres and two-thirds of ironworks. That year his son John is born in the mansion.

1790--1829: Ridgely's empire grows to 25,000 acres with ironworks, grain crops, beef cattle, thoroughbred horses, coal mining, marble quarries, mills, and mercantile interests. In 1815 Ridgely is elected Governor of Maryland.

1828: John Carnan Ridgely marries Eliza Eichelberger Ridgely (no relation.) John inherits the house and 4,500 acres in 1829, remainder of the property is split among other heirs. The Governor's will also frees most of his 300-plus slaves.

1861--65: Civil War. The end of slavery (1864 in Maryland) and economic hardships begin Hampton's decline.

1867: John and Eliza's son Charles, who had managed the estate for almost two decades, inherits the property.

1872: House and remaining 1,000 acres go to son "Captain John" Ridgely upon the death of Charles. In the 1880s John's mother Margaretta Sophia Howard Ridgely oversees major renovations to the mansion.

1938: John Ridgely Jr. inherits core of Hampton property and resides in mansion with family.

1948: Based on outstanding architectural merit, mansion and 43 acres are designated a national historic site. John Ridgely Jr. and his wife continue to live at Hampton, residing in the farmhouse, mansion is opened for tours.

1979: National Park Service takes over administration of the mansion and 60 acres.

Nephew of the childless Captain, Charles Ridgely Carnan, 1760--1829, inherited the largest portion of Hampton's land and business concerns provided he take Ridgely as his surname. The Second Master of Hampton made the estate a showplace.



Third Master of Hampton, John Ridgely was the first member of the family born in the mansion. With his wife, Eliza he lavished money and attention on the gardens. He was the last member of the family who owned enslaved people.



Elected captain of the Baltimore County Horse Guard, a local defense cavalry, at the outbreak of the Civil War,

John and Eliza's son, Charles Ridgely was threatened with arrest for actions against the Union Army. The guard was disbanded and Charles was inactive during the war despite his Southern sympathies. Though Hampton was physically untouched by war, its slave-based economy was no longer workable by the time Charles became Fourth Master.



Fifth Master John Ridgely, his wife Helen, and mother Margaretta, who managed Hampton from 1872 to 1900, worked hard to preserve the aristocratic traditions.



As Sixth Master of Hampton, John Ridgely Jr. formed a business to build homes on Hampton land. He finally sold the estate to a Mellon family trust, which donated it to the American People.



HAMPTON ESTATE 1790--1829

PRINCELY PASTIMES

“It has been truly said of Hampton that it expresses more grandeur than any other place in America,” wrote Henry Winthrop Sargent in 1859. It was the first three Masters of Hampton who were responsible for the reputation it enjoyed for decades. Captain Charles Ridgely, known as “the Builder” of one of the largest Georgian mansions in the country, his nephew and heir, Charles Carnan Ridgely “the Governor,” whose successes in business and politics brought attention from prominent circles; and the Governor’s son John Ridgely who, with his wife Eliza, purchased elegant furnishings from abroad and nurtured the gardens and grounds into the serene vistas they remain today.



Revolutionary leader Charles Carroll described a party at Hampton in the early 1800s for which 300 invitations were issued. Such events were staged not only for entertainment but to cement business and political ties. Hampton mansion was ideal for such festivities: its Great Hall measures 51 by 21 feet and could seat more than 50 dinner guests. An English visitor noted in 1805 that Charles Carnan Ridgely was said to “keep the best table in America.”

Upon the death of his uncle, Charles Ridgely Carnan took Ridgely as his surname, inherited most of Hampton’s property and lands, and proceeded to consolidate the Ridgely fortune. Like his uncle, Ridgely had a townhouse in Baltimore and spent only part of the year at Hampton. In 1908 he was remembered as “the typical aristocrat of his day. He had the fortune that enabled him to live like a prince, and he also had the inclination.”

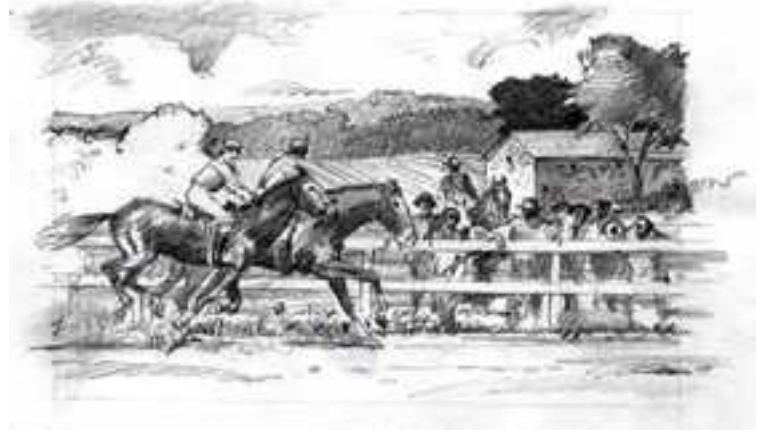


Governor’s “Post Boy” racing trophy, 1805.

Madeira shipped in casks was bottled and recorked at Hampton 1815.



Hampton was famous for horses. Breeding and racing thoroughbreds began in the late 1700s, before the mansion was built. By 1805, Charles Carnan Ridgely had constructed the first stone stable and laid out a racecourse on his property. Ridgely, owner of some of the finest thoroughbreds in America, was in large part responsible for Maryland's reputation as the center of American racing in the early 19th century. A silver trophy, presented to the Governor in 1805, depicts one of his favorite thoroughbreds, Post Boy. Even while Hampton declined after the Civil War, the Ridgely's continued racing, breeding, and fox hunting well into the 20th century.



INDUSTRIES FUELING A NEW NATION

First and foremost Hampton was a family business. The 1,500-acre Northampton tract, first acquired by a Ridgely in 1745, had all the essential elements for ironmaking: iron ore, limestone used in the ironmaking process, timber providing charcoal to fuel the furnace, and waterpower from a tributary of the Gunpowder River. By 1762 when Charles Ridgely established an ironworks on the land he referred to as his "Plantation in the Forest," iron was one of the most profitable exports of the mid-Atlantic colonies. The local government and the British crown encouraged this industry through tax incentives and other benefits. By 1776, the American colonies together were the world's largest producer of raw iron. Ridgely owned a fleet of merchant ships, which transported raw iron and cash crops to Europe in exchange for finished goods. In addition, he owned mills, quarries, orchards, and a general merchandising business in downtown Baltimore. These enterprises made Ridgely a wealthy man and formed the basis of his heir's fortunes as well.



Nearly two centuries after Hampton's ironworks were established, historian Carl Bridenbaugh described ironmaking in colonial times; "a large tract of undeveloped woodlands was needed to supply charcoal for a furnace; a farm had to be operated to furnish food and other necessities for the labor force . . . Care of the wagons, tools, machinery, and other equipment required the work of carpenters, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, cartwrights, millers, and sawyers to such an extent that an iron plantation was probably the most self-sufficient large economic unit in America." Besides Northampton, the Ridgelys owned major interests in several other ironworks. An early 19th century iron furnace is shown at left.



Seafaring was a Ridgely family occupation from the time of Maryland's settlements in the 17th century. Like other shipping concerns in the Chesapeake region Ridgely ships such as the Baltimore Town carried raw foodstuffs and pig iron

to England. They then returned with manufactured goods and luxury items some of which you can see in the mansion today.



As the Revolutionary War approached, this trade system broke down. Disputes between British and colonial merchants were among the significant causes of the war.

Trade between America and Britain ceased between 1775 and 1783, but once the war ended, merchant shipping quickly resumed. Cash crops, a major overseas export from Hampton, changed through the years. By Charles Carnan Ridgely's time, tobacco, which rapidly depleted the soil, had given way to corn, wheat, and other grains. That Baltimore ascended in the status of a major

East Coast port was due in part to Hampton's products and the Ridgely merchant fleet.

The mid-Atlantic colonies generally produced raw iron for shipment to England, where it was turned into finished products. Northampton Ironworks, however, also produced finished products in the 18th century. Northampton's main products were pig iron--molten iron cast into bars for easy shipment--and household implements. The American Revolution found the Ridgelys aligned with the Patriot cause. The ironworks turned out camp kettles, round shot ranging from 2 to 18 pounds, and cannons of various sizes. Guns from the works were judged at the time "to be the equal in quality of any yet made on the continent." War profits from the ironworks allowed Captain Ridgely to greatly expand his property holdings, in part by buying up confiscated Loyalist property.



HAMPTON AT WORK

Hampton the showplace was very much the domain of the Ridgely family and their peers. But behind the scenes was a large community of people who labored at the ironworks, in the fields, on the docks and ships, in gardens and orchards, and inside the mansion. They lived and worked in obscurity in return for shelter, rations, of corn, pork, herring, flour, clothing, shoes, and perhaps, but not always income.



In colonial days, Hampton labor force included indentured servants, immigrants mainly from the British Isles who labored for a period of years until their passage fee to America was paid back. In addition there were free artisans and tradesmen, convict laborers, and during the Revolution, British prisoners of war. Families, including children, worked together. Most of these people eventually had some degree of social mobility--unlike enslaved people. Charles Ridgely Carnan freed most of his slaves upon

his death, but the era of forced servitude at Hampton remained until Maryland state law ended the practice in 1864--in the midst of the Civil War.

Slaves were present at Hampton from its beginnings and worked in every capacity. Hampton's enslaved population at its height numbered more than 300, making it one of the largest slave plantations in Maryland. Enslaved people worked in both skilled and unskilled capacities; they were field hands, cobblers, woodcutters, limestone and marble quarries, millers, ironworkers, blacksmiths, gardeners, and jockeys. Slaves also performed household chores including cleaning, cooking, serving food, and caring for children. The Ridgelys often paid many slaves for extra work in addition to their regular duties. Today, in order to compensate for the lack of slave generated documents, research continues into the lives of Hampton's slaves and servants.



Nancy Davis was born a slave in 1838. She chose to stay on as a servant after she received her freedom.

CHRISTMAS GIFTS, of the Colored Children
of Hampton, given by E. Ridgely

Yr. & Name	1841.	1842.	1843.	1844.
Annist Davis	A doll.	A doll.	Too old to receive toys.	
Maria Baker	Doll's room	A doll.	China & doll	A doll
Ellen Davis	A chair & a doll	Box of needles	A boy doll	A doll
Augustus Gille	A harmonica	Two bed clothes put out of the house		
Joe Pratt	Two tin trunks	Bag of needles	A trumpet	A drum
Caroline Pratt	A book case	A doll	Box of paper	A doll
Levis Davis	Tom's hammer	A trumpet	A drum	Box of soap
Lisa Wells	A doll	(not to receive any gift)	Sandwich pipe	Box of soap
Amanda Wells	A doll	(A young girl)	Beads & doll	Cap & handkerchief
John Gully	Lead in foot	A drum	A hand horse	A trumpet
John Pratt	Lead in pipe	Box of needles	A trumpet	A horse

Young Eliza Ridgely's list of Christmas gifts to enslaved children.