

# Interview with Author George W. McDaniel

Historian George W. McDaniel's new book, "Drayton Hall Stories: A Place and Its People" was released in April by Evening Post Books to positive reviews. He has been presenting at seminars, conferences, symposiums, historic sites, and schools, including the SC Preservation Conference, Atlanta History Center, History Leadership Institute, Charleston Library Society, Dray-



**Mary E. Regan**

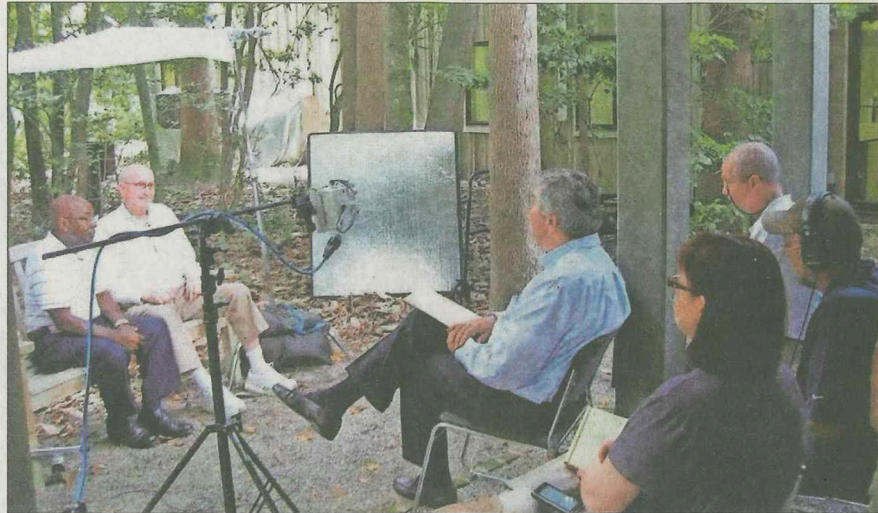
ton Hall, and at the Summerville Preservation Society, Timrod Library, and Main Street Reads.

He is president of McDaniel Consulting, LLC, a strategy firm that helps organizations use history to build bridges within itself and to its broader constituents. Drayton Hall, located at 3380 Ashley River Rd. in Charleston (West Ashley), was founded in 1738. It is the earliest and finest example of Palladian architecture in the U.S.

It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1966. McDaniel served as its Executive Director for over 25 years.

**Regan:** You interviewed 50 individuals connected with Drayton Hall. How long did it take to research and write the book?

**McDaniel:** This book is a compilation of transcribed



DRAYTON HALL PRESERVATION TRUST

**George McDaniel interviews Rev. Roosevelt Geddis and Charlie Drayton.**

videos of programs and interviews I recorded during my last decade at Drayton Hall. They were not conceptualized to become a cohesive book, but to be used as resources for different projects. In the winter of '20, Anthony C. Wood, a member of the board of the new Drayton Hall Preservation Trust, suggested I turn them into a book. Too often, he explained, historic sites devote more attention to their earlier periods than to their recent history. Thanks to Drayton Hall's generosity, I was given access to the transcripts and photographs; to fill voids, I did more interviews.

**R:** What do you consider your favorite or most important story on Drayton Hall's history?

**M:** There are many important stories in its history, but I think that it is Drayton

Hall's ability to tell the full American story. Many centuries-old historic sites across the nation have that same ability, but most still focus on their founding period to the neglect of the recent past. My book supports the idea of moving visitors through history and across time periods to the present day in multiple ways, interweaving different stories according to race, gender, occupation, age, relationship to the site, etc. The recent past doesn't have to be a void. Other sites can do what I have done with interviews and photographs spanning the last century in order to better capture the entire sweep of history.

Since my book went to press, six of its voices have since passed on, but their thoughts, and those of others, have been preserved. My hope is that one day

their descendants will build upon this new foundation. What this book also brings to light is the importance of the "little stories"—the ones we recognize and appreciate as they emphasize our common humanity. Here is one of many: Lorraine White is the retired choir director at Alston Middle School here. For years, she brought students to perform and participate in Drayton Hall's school programs. Her father, the Rev. Roosevelt Geddis, is a Methodist minister whose maternal grandparents and probably his maternal great-grandparents lived and worked at Drayton Hall. In 2012, Drayton Hall dedicated the African American cemetery of the 1790s, and I invited Lorraine, whom I knew. I introduced her to Charlie Drayton, the last owner of the property. She asked if he

knew her great grandmother "Binah," who lived at Drayton Hall. Charlie's head tilted back and with a big smile, he said: "Binah? When I was little, my parents used to bring me out here, and it was Binah who took care of me. Her name I remember well." They embraced.

**R:** The theme of moving forward and forgiveness about slavery runs throughout the pages. However, you were a key part in guiding the reconciliation process at Drayton Hall. In general, are you hopeful about race relations?

**M:** I believe we are making progress, yes, but there is always more work to be done. Many years ago, when Dr. Bernard Powers, now professor emeritus of history at the College of Charleston and the first Director of its Center for the Study of Slavery, first toured Drayton Hall, he was told stories about its White inhabitants with "just a bit about the African American experience." In my interview with him, he described how as Drayton Hall changed, he said, "[I] worked with the site, and my feelings evolved. I've met Black and White descendants, given talks, consulted, and written reports. Now, when I walk the grounds, I have a sense of reverence I did not feel the first time."

**R:** Do you have another book in the works?

**M:** I plan to write about my Vietnam experiences. I was in the Peace Corps in West Africa in '68 before I

was drafted to fight with the First Infantry Division between Saigon and Cambodia. I saw enough combat to see what war does to people and got blown up twice — once when a friend, who was walking point ahead of me, stepped on a booby-trapped mortar round. I can still touch the shrapnel in my chin.

**R:** What is next for you?

**M:** I want to continue to reach out to libraries, high schools, and colleges which have a history program, especially ones with historical preservation as a component, to connect students with my work. In fact, I hope my book will inspire readers of all ages to engage in historic preservation. While its stories center on Drayton Hall, the approach used is universal to any place. Because it helps to have a structure to build on, I produced a toolkit at the end of my book, which is supplemented with more resources on my website for readers who want to bring a similar project to life in their communities.

■ FMI: <https://evepost-books.com/product/drayton-hall-stories-a-place-and-its-people/>

■ Or <https://www.draytonhall.org/> Or [www.McDanielConsulting.net](http://www.McDanielConsulting.net)

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