Old Towne Creek County Park – Grand Opening Fact Sheet

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Park Overview

Old Towne Creek County Park
1400 Old Towne Rd, Charleston, SC 29407
854-222-6440 or 843-795-4386 / CharlestonCountyParks.com / https://www.ccprc.com/listing/old-towne-creek-county-park-(grand-opening-june-30!)/22/

Hours of operation:
January – April: 8 a.m. – sunset
May – August: 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.
September – December: 8 a.m. – sunset

Park general admission: $2 per person; free for Gold Pass holders and children 2 and under

What to Expect When you Visit
Located in West Ashley, Old Towne Creek County Park offers families and the community the opportunity to enjoy recreation and beautiful open spaces, while learning about history as well as the natural environment.

Once known as Ashem Farm, the 67-acre property was owned most recently by Emily Ravenel Farrow. It has been permanently protected through a conservation easement established with the Historic Charleston Foundation. Thanks to Mrs. Farrow's vision and generosity, the land was ultimately preserved for public use, ensuring access to scenic views, wildlife habitat, education, and recreation for generations to come.

Amenities include:
- One mile loop trail with packed stone surface, featuring beautiful views of Old Towne Creek, plus an additional half mile of trails throughout the park
- Interpretive signage sharing the cultural and natural history of the site and the surrounding communities
- Boardwalk trails and water views from a dock (no water access or fishing)
- Nature-inspired playground with rubberized surfacing and accessible elements
- Small amphitheater/outdoor classroom
- Green spaces
-The Giving Tree, an outdoor art installation that serves as a fundraiser for the Charleston County Parks Foundation
- Abundant plant life, including live oaks, an Arboretum featuring over 20 different species of woody plants, and many blooming ornamentals planted years ago by mother and daughter Emily Simmons Ravenel and Emily Ravenel Farrow

Structures open to the public at the site include:
- The Paddock Pavilion, a shelter located near the playground that features restrooms and outdoor seating, and will be used as an outdoor classroom for educational sessions
- The Fox Field Shelter, constructed by Clemson School of Architecture's CommunityBUILD program
- The original "Rain Hut" building was preserved and repurposed as the Welcome Center. The Rain Hut once provided shelter to pupils of Miss Em's Saint Andrews Riding Academy. Today, the Welcome Center will serve as the starting point for many guests' visit to the park, where they can pay admission and purchase items from the small gift shop.

Events and programming will be offered at the site throughout the year, including the popular Wine Down Wednesday series once offered at the site, with the first event set for Aug. 26 and additional dates in September. Educational and nature programming for children and adults will also be offered.

Accessibility highlights:
Accessible parking with paved route to Welcome Center
Accessible restrooms with adult changing stations, and accessible picnic tables at the Paddock Pavilion
Playground has accessible surface and inclusive play elements

Park rules of note:
Pets must be kept on leash
Do not feed, harass, destroy or remove plants, animals or artifacts.
Stay on marked trails and paths
Trash and recycling receptacles available on site
No swimming, fishing/crabbing, hunting, or boating
Bicycles permitted but must be walked on boardwalks and ramps

Site History

Interpretive signage throughout the park tells of history of the Old Towne site as well as the West Ashley area, including Maryville and surrounding neighborhoods, and events that shaped the community.

Property historical timeline
1694–1697: Lords Proprietors grant James Le Sade 760 acres including part of Old Towne Creek County Park.
1867: Land sold and divided by several owners before Edward Legare purchases Old Towne Plantation.
1913–1915: Charles Jervey Ravenel purchases and moves to what is now Old Towne Creek County Park. Ravenel practices truck farming and crop experimentation into the 1940s on the property he renames Weehawken.
1947: Emily Ravenel marries John Ashby Farrow and takes over her father's land, renaming it "Ashem." Emily continues her family's riding school, teaching and riding horses into her 90s.
2005: Emily Ravenel Farrow and the Historic Charleston Foundation agree to a conservation easement protecting the property from development.
2011: Emily Farrow leaves Ashem to the Lowcountry Land Trust in her will. Charleston County Park & Recreation purchases the property.

Just across Old Towne Creek is Charles Towne Landing State Historic Site. Historically, both Charles Towne Landing and Old Towne Creek County Park were part of Old Towne Plantation. Evidence of human settlement on these lands include Native American pottery sherds dating back 4,000 years and African and African-American 19th century colonoware pieces. Ongoing archival and archaeological research will reveal their stories at Old Towne Creek County Park.

From 1913-15, Charles Jervey Ravenel purchased the land at Old Towne Creek County Park and operated a truck farm at the site, which he called Weehawken, through the mid-twentieth century. Many local farmers had turned to truck farming at this time, or small-scaled market farming, for their livelihoods. He grew and shipped a variety of vegetables including tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, cabbage, potatoes, turnips, and spinach. Ravenel also hosted truck farming demonstrations. Charles and his daughter Emily set up the St. Andrews Riding Academy here in 1931.

Most farming ended in the 1940s and Emily and her husband Ashby inherited the property in 1947, calling it Ashem Farm. "Miss Em" protected the majority of land from development. She established a conservation easement in 2005 preserving this landscape for people and natural habitats.

Today, the land of Old Towne Creek County Park is conserved as a living memorial to Emily Simmons Ravenel (1886-1971) by her late daughter Emily Ravenel Farrow (1915-2011). These remarkable women and their families cultivated and protected these fields and woods along Old Towne Creek for the perpetual enjoyment of future generations. Both mother and daughter were passionate gardeners, and are responsible for planting many of the ornamental plants you see here today. In her estate plans, Mrs. Farrow directed this property to be preserved with strict limits on development to ensure the land remains a quiet place for learning and reflection. After her death in 2011, the Charleston County Park & Recreation purchased the land from Lowcountry Land Trust. Historic Charleston Foundation holds the conservation easement on the property. This site must provide public benefits, such as scenic views, wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation, and the preservation of historic buildings.

Until 2023, Charleston County Parks maintained the land and used the site for select low-impact special events such as Wine Down Wednesday. Public input on the master planning process was gathered in 2017. The park master planning process and a separate resource interpretation planning process were both guided by steering committees comprised of local subject matter experts.

In April 2023, Phase I Development of Old Towne Creek County Park began; this included:

- Renovations of an existing building
- Roof replacement of existing stable buildings
- New restroom/pavilion building
- New maintenance building
- New accessible boardwalks and overlooks
- Playground with inclusive play elements and surfacing
- Accessible crushed stone pathways and concrete sidewalks and paths
- Landscaped areas with irrigation
- Natural history and cultural resource interpretation signage
- Parking areas
- Decorative fencing and gates along frontage
- Preservation of old brick entry and gates, and repurposed as a pedestrian entrance
- New paved vehicular entryway and deceleration/turning lane on Old Towne Road
- Site lighting
- Various utility additions and upgrades

Old Towne Creek County Park officially opened to the public in 2026. Today, the park's official name recognizes its historic setting along Old Towne Creek. The trails, views and majestic oaks, camellias, and azaleas you experience here honor Mrs. Farrow's wish to preserve wildlife habitat, open space, and public access to nature. The site was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2026 for its unique landscape setting and Main House and Caretaker's House architecture.

Wildlife and Plant Life in the park

Old Towne Creek County Park, like many places in West Ashley, is made up of diverse plant, wildlife, and human communities. The semi-tropical climate allows for a great diversity of plants and animals. Native plants that thrive here include Live Oak, American Holly, and Eastern Red Cedar. Along Old Towne Creek's marsh edge, a maritime forest shrub community includes wax myrtle, yaupon, and red cedar.

The Arboretum

Old Towne Creek County Park is home to an accredited Level 1 arboretum, called the Ashem Arboretum, joining just nine others in South Carolina. An arboretum is a living museum of trees and woody plants, grown and cared for by an organization committed to their stewardship. Arboreta serve not only as beautiful places to explore and enjoy, but can also provide vital community resources for personal wellness, environmental education, ecological conservation, and scientific research.

The Ashem Arboretum at Old Towne Creek County Park offers a biodiverse landscape featuring open fields, mature azaleas, camellias, and live oak groves. The arboretum reflects former owner Farrow's passion for intentional ornamental planting and land stewardship, serving as a living connection between past and present. Winding trails guide visitors through a collection of 28 labeled woody plant species - including live oaks, southern magnolias, and palms -making it easy to explore, learn, and engage with the landscape. Each plant is identified as native, non-native ornamental, or non-native invasive, offering a valuable opportunity for visitors to better understand sustainable planting practices and make informed choices in their own gardens.

Today, the arboretum is uniquely managed by full-time park staff, reflecting a strong commitment to ongoing care, interpretation, and stewardship. With views of nearby marshes and waterways, the Ashem Arboretum provides a peaceful, enriching outdoor experience rooted in conservation, history, and community enjoyment.

At the opening on June 30, a live oak was planted as a Community Tree in the arboretum to celebrate the park opening.

Trees in the arboretum include:
American elm, American sycamore, Black Tupelo, Camellia, Camphor, Carolina cherry laurel, Chinaberry, Crape Myrtle, Creeping fig, Eastern redbud, Live oak, Loblolly pine, Loquat, Mimosa, Muscadine vine, Palmetto, Pecan, Post oak, Red maple, Southern magnolia, Southern red oak, Spruce pine, Sugarberry, Sweet gum

Wildlife who call the park home vary, and may include species designated on interpretive signage, such as Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, pollinators, green anoles, fiddler crabs and more.

Old Towne Creek County Park team

Owners: Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission (CCPRC)

Park Master Planning and Development Team: CCPRC, Stantec (lead consultant, landscape architecture, civil engineering), Liollio Architecture (architectural design), Biohabitats (environmental assessment), Passarella & Associates (wetland permitting), Parker Land Surveying, Steering Committee

Park Master Planning Steering Committee: CCPRC, Charles Towne Landing (SCPRT), City of Charleston, Historic Charleston Foundation, Lowcountry Land Trust

Interpretive Master Planning Team: CCPRC, The Design Minds (interpretation consultant), Interpretation Steering Committee

Interpretive Steering Committee: CCPRC, Historic Charleston Foundation, Lowcountry STEM Collaborative, Clemson Extension, College of Charleston (Teacher Education), Charles Towne Landing, and independent West Ashley historians and authors