

## Former SC Rice Plantation South of Charleston Fetches \$7.9 Million

by Warren L. Wise



*Tomotley Plantation, dating back to 1698 in Beaufort County, recently sold for \$7.9 million.*

In 1698, the 13,000-acre Tomotley Plantation sprang up in the South Carolina Lowcountry southwest of Charleston.

Using slave labor, it thrived as a rice plantation until after the Civil War, though the sprawling Beaufort County tract had been carved up over time among descendants of original owner Capt. Edmund Bellinger and subsequent landowners.

Recently, the 1,014-acre remaining tract of the former expansive farming operation changed hands again.

A firm called The Tomotley Crew LLC bought the house, farmland and a hunting preserve from William and Barbara Mixon for \$7.9 million, according to Beaufort County land records.

C.J. Brown with real estate firm Jon Kohler & Associates held the listing, which originally posted an asking price of \$10.495 million in the fall of 2018.

"It is certainly one of the most prestigious, aesthetically pleasing and iconic duck hunting plantations in the entire region," Brown said.

Sixty miles from Charleston and near the Sheldon Church Ruins, Tomotley Barony, a name believed to have derived from the Cherokee Indians, was formed just as rice was beginning to take root as a major cash crop in the new Carolina colony, less than 30 years after Charles Town was settled.

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During the Civil War, Union troops torched the plantation, though a manager's house, hunting lodge, barns and stables survived and are still on site.

With slave labor no longer in place and a series of punishing hurricanes in the late 1800s, rice farming disappeared from South Carolina by the beginning of the 1900s.

That's when wealthy Northern businessmen began buying up former plantations in the post-war South as hunting retreats.

Robert H. McMurdy, a foreign officer for New York Mutual Life Insurance and a member of the Okeetee Club hunting preserve in neighboring Jasper County, bought Tomotley in 1910, when he built the grand plantation house that sits there now.

In the 1990s, the Mixons breathed new life back into the property and structures, built the lake behind the main house, reclaimed the rice impoundments and renovated the plantation house.

Located in the ACE Basin conservation district, the road leading to the heart of the plantation is canopied by dual half-mile avenues of live oaks planted in 1820 to create a moss-dripping passageway.

The 5,586-square-foot home features five bedrooms, 5½ baths and views of a 14-acre lake. The one-story main house includes a large foyer and expansive rooms.

The property, off Interstate 95 and U.S. Highway 17 west of Gardens Corner, includes a 2,800-square-foot hunting lodge with five bedrooms and three bathrooms. Nearly 250 acres are controlled impoundments for waterfowl hunting. Another 125 acres are still used for rice production.

Part of the estate, 240 acres called Tomotley Quail Preserve, made up \$2 million of the overall selling price. The old-growth acreage is managed by fire and serves as a prime habitat for deer and turkeys. About 770 acres of the former plantation are protected through a conservation easement.



*Horses graze around Tomotley Plantation, which dates back to 1698 as a rice plantation in Beaufort County southwest of Charleston. Provided/Jon Kohler & Associates*

*Photos by Jon Kohler & Associates*