

### **1. The Charleston Renaissance – do you see a repeat in the near future?**

Thanks to the leadership of key local institutions – some new; some old –, there is currently a renaissance of the arts of all kinds in Charleston whereby more diverse voices are being heard, particularly from the African American Gullah community. As new generations arise, such resurgences will occur again and again with some themes repeating along with others evolving anew from other opportunities and challenges.

### **2. How has the Charleston Renaissance continued to affect the Lowcountry’s way of life?**

The Charleston Renaissance saved the fabric of the historic city at a time when it could have been lost forever as occurred so often elsewhere in the name of modernity and progress. The local importance of technical artistic excellence was likewise highlighted, a tradition that continues vibrantly. But a critical scholarly reexamination of old values is important with some outlooks being discounted and others being further explored and celebrated. That’s the nature of life as one generation supplants the previous in a timeless cycle. Such change also has great value.

### **3. What are key takeaways from Smith’s professional discipline that should be part of our training programs of today for high school and college students?**

One of Alice Smith’s key dictums was that one should “Open the windows of the mind to let in the fresh air!” She practiced her preaching by continuously experimenting with new artistic approaches. She also believed in immersing herself in her subject matter literally: Although she was a petite female from an elite if economically-reduced set, she differed from her lady-like peers in that she got up early many mornings to sail on the waters which abounded in the South Carolina Lowcountry. She waded through the reptile-filled marshes and swamps with an alligator stick to experience fully the beautiful flora and fauna of the land wherein she lived. She journeyed throughout the land by foot, in carriages, and only much later by car and spoke with the rural workers of the forests and the fields, observed their methods carefully and captured them expressively in her art. She was an energetic force in Charleston’s civic and cultural life and inspired many other artists – particularly female ones – to succeed well. While she had some faults like any person, she also had immense strengths which today’s youth could do well to emulate—in their own unique ways, of course!

### **4. How might Smith’s contributions affect areas other than the arts as South Carolina comes to grips with its past, present, and future?**

Alice Smith loved the South Carolina Lowcountry intensively: its people, its land, and its special City of Charleston. She rarely left it, because it was central to her being. With her father, she produced a key book, *The Dwelling Houses of Charleston*, which sparked her generation to create the nation’s first historic district, inspiring other similar undertakings from coast to coast. She also worked with her contemporaries to protect the environment, particularly heronries, and her legacy has caused others to continue to champion our fragile coastal landscape.

### **5. What was Alice's most important influence in her private life?**

“Nature, I loved and next to nature, art” is the saying by Walter Savage Landor which is inscribed in her tombstone, and it was nature which influenced her most strongly. From her early years when she explored it with her father, to her middle days when she experienced its raptures on her own, to her later times when she described it in hundreds of letters to others who she mentored, it was always for her the most important force.

### **6. What was Alice's most important influence in her artistic life?**

Ah, I will not give that away: Read the book *Alice: Alice Ravenel Huger Smith, Charleston Renaissance Artist* by me and my co-authors Caroline Palmer and Anne Tinker, and then YOU decide for yourself!

*Dwight McInvaill, April 2022*