

# Museum Around the Corner

## Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

We know much of the story of the rice culture that abounded from 1790 to 1861 in Georgetown County which made us the wealthiest county in the United States in the 1850s. One element of the life style of these wealthy rice plantation owners begins in early spring, just about the time the mosquitos began to make their appearance. According to the Georgetown newspaper of May 17, 1843, "Our town is assuming, in one sense, the appearance of a ship being dismantled, and to be laid up in dry dock. Many of our neighbors who have tarried with us during the winter, have departed not to return again till we shall have nursed and harvested the growing crop and till a frost shall have destroyed vegetation. Some have gone to the mountains of this and the adjoining State, some to the North and many to our neighbouring city of Charleston. The crowd on the steamer Anson yesterday morning and the trip previous, brought upon as many reflections, as to the extent of the emigration. So it has been since 1808 – and so it will be we fear as long as frogs remind to alarm as to summer, and the mosquitoes to bite in the autumnal months."

The annual trek of the wealthy families to resort areas began in 1808 when planting families left their plantations for cooler climes. Some went to the mountains of North Carolina, around Flat Rock and Asheville. This popular resort on the French Broad River began to gain fame for Low Country planters when Dr. J.F.E Hardy, a resident of South Carolina, sought the purer air to cure his tuberculosis. He was successful in seeking a remedy and practiced medicine for the next sixty-one years in Asheville. He was frequently visited by Low Country friends who carried the fame of the mountains back home. By 1830, the village of Asheville was known as the "Little Charleston of the Mountains". These visitors included some Georgetown County residents.

Some families took this time as an opportunity to do some traveling. Often, children of these wealthy families attended schools in England and France and were delivered to school or were retrieved at the end of their term.

Many of the local planters built large summer houses on Pawleys Island. Plowden C.J. Weston of Hagley had his master builder, Renty Tucker, construct a large summer home on Hagley, numbered each board, then disassembled it, floated it to Pawleys Island and rebuilt it there. Today, it is known as the Pelican Inn. Joshua John Ward, Robert F.W.Allston, Joseph Blyth Allston, and Robert Nesbit were some of the many wealthy planters who had summer getaways on Pawleys. Most of these houses are still used and have been protected from the worst of storms because they were tucked away behind large sand dunes.

The autumnal breezes signaled the time for these neighbors to return home to Georgetown County. As they celebrated Christmas, they began to turn their attention to the upcoming social season in Charleston. January, February and part of March were months for those in "High Society" to gather for rounds of grand balls, soirees, and general hospitality. By 1850, most of the Georgetown planters owned some of the grandest houses of Charleston. Some were new construction and some bought the "elegant ladies" of old Charleston.

In addition to the plantation houses, summer getaways, and Charleston homes, almost every planter had a house in Georgetown. A ride down any street in the Historic District will show that the most elegant houses were those built by planters. A blue plaque on front porches indicates the year the structure was built as far as we know. The second number indicates the corresponding number in the Chamber of Commerce's walking tour map. A brief sentence tells something of interest about each site. The Georgetown County Historical Society has published a Guide to the City which gives a complete story, as far as we know, about each building. These are available at the Museum on Broad Street.