

## Museum Around the Corner

### The Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

Grover Cleveland ©

Some secrets are just too good to keep to oneself, but in the case of a visit of a sitting President of the United States, not a word was uttered of the arrival in Georgetown of President Grover Cleveland on Sunday, the 16<sup>th</sup> of December, 1894. In the words of a reporter for the Georgetown Semi-Weekly Times of December 19, 1894, "Last Sunday it was rumored around that President Cleveland was expected to arrive here on Monday morning by special train accompanied by several friends, to enjoy an outing in our marshes after ducks. The U.S. steamer Wisteria was seen to come into port on Saturday and remain here until Sunday morning when she steamed down the bay, returning that night, mooring at the Georgetown and Western Railroad wharf. While some credited the rumor, others pooh-baah'd the idea as "fake". But nothing of the kind, for on last Monday morning at 6:15 the special train bringing one of Pullman's best sleepers rolled into the depot and down to the G & W RR wharf and from it alighted the President of the United States, Grover Cleveland, accompanied by his friends. [After a greeting by a few dignitaries] the moorings were cast off and the Wisteria steamed down the river for Winyah Bay, where the ship now lies at anchor. We understand that the President and his friends will remain until next Saturday, shooting for game in the marshes of Annandale Game Club – that which there are no finer hunting grounds to be found anywhere. The weather is charming such as this place is noted for; but it is not good duck weather. We must have it colder and more disagreeable. But the shooting is fine in almost any kind of weather. "

In another column of this same edition, the reporter writes, "The committee returned about dark yesterday. They found the Wisteria in Muddy Bay, but the President had just returned from a duck hunt and under the advice of his physician has retired to rest." Speculation and some fact take over the story at this point. Local knowledge has it that during the hunt, the President embarked on a small craft to be taken to the shore to hunt from the dry land. Several stories relate different reasons why the President actually fell overboard from the skiff, whether it was from taking a shot while standing up, or that a gust of wind upset the balance and he fell in, or that he was exiting the skiff to get out onto dry land when he fell. Whatever the circumstance, he was only in about one foot of water and in very little peril. He found himself in our famous pluff mud and lost his boots in the muck. One article says that the local guide was Sawney Caines, who pulled the President out of his boots, settled him in the boat and retrieved the boots. Being cold and wet at worst, (it was December, after all) we do not know if the President pressed on to the shoot, or was returned to the Wisteria. This may explain the report that his physician had advised him to retire to rest that afternoon.

In another article, published in the Charleston Mercury Magazine of Autumn, 2016, writer Ben Moise, wrote, "One evening, after a duck hunt and while awaiting the sixth or seventh platter of duck livers with fried hominy and celery salad, Cleveland and his crowd were sitting around swapping stories on the stern of the *Diana*. Andrews Simonds' wife, Daisy, later wrote an account of what she heard. It seems that a spark from Cleveland's cigar landed in "his hunting jacket where there were a few loose grains of

powder; a flash fire and a slight explosion ensued.” John, the steward, fell back through the galley door, platter of duck livers in hand, and exclaimed: “Great Gawd! He done buss! I knowed it was boun’ to happen!” The President enjoyed telling the story for many years. The locals took a great shine to “Mr. President”, as they teased him constantly – the clear way of knowing that these were not “power hunts” but sporting trips with true friends. “

For the rest of the week, festivities abounded honoring the President. The Georgetown Semi-Weekly Times called on the citizens thus, “Let every store and house along the line be decorated. Recollect it is in honor of the visit of the President of the U.S. to our city. Let us show our distinguished visitors and all visitors what we can do. Decorate. Decorate. Today. Today”.

“President Cleveland will stand in the rotunda of the second story of the Indigo Hall today at the head of the steps. The crowd will approach him in single file, going up the left hand staircase and descending on the right. This hand-shaking will continue for one hour exactly. Let every thing be done decently and in order.”

Just before departing Georgetown on Saturday, December 22, 1894, the President was entertained at a luncheon hosted by the Palmetto Club. At precisely 3:45, he left the luncheon and boarded the special train for his trip back to Washington. It was reported that he would arrive back at the White House just in time for breakfast the following morning. One wonders if duck was on that menu.“