

A Description of Georgetown in 1882 ©

The Georgetown County Historical Society and Museum

The June 23, 1882 edition of the Georgetown Enquirer brings this description of our city by a "fair visitor", C. Cohen.

"You ask me, my dear friend, for some few particulars regarding this old Southern town, and though as yet I have seen but little of it, I will tell you all I can. Georgetown is situated on the Sampit River, and is almost an island, Black River at the back of it, the Sampit in front, Winyah Bay on one side, so that it has but one part bounded by land. The river is only brackish, not salt, for we are here only near enough the sea to occasionally hear its roar.

Georgetown is about one and a half miles wide and one and a half long and is well laid out, its houses are mostly old and built when people were slaveholders and as a rule are substantial and large, and handsomely furnished inside, but many are allowed to get out of repair and all look as if they badly needed paint.

The trade of the place is excellent for its size, and consists mostly of turpentine, rosin, tar, etc. (known as "naval stores") also rice, which yields generously, and cotton. The number of inhabitants is about 2500, the negroes outnumbering the whites.

The climate is almost moist and cool though not considered secure from malaria towards the autumn months; in winter it is about the temperature of Charleston and perfectly healthy. The drawback to the prosperity and growth of the place has been the fact, that no railroad runs nearer than thirty-five miles from the town. Its coast is frequented by small steamers and sailing vessels of every description, and lumber is shipped from here in large quantities. The railroad will be completed in the course of a year which will secure a commercial future only needed to make Georgetown better known. The town is perhaps as regularly laid out as any of the largest cities, the streets all run completely through the length or width, and at the end of every one, the water is visible; they are wide and superbly shaded by great Live Oaks, Pride of India and Trees-of-Heaven, forming solid arches of greenery, draped and softened by the graceful veilings of pale gray moss. The houses are as a rule, are of wood, generally two or three stories high, built in an old fashioned picturesque style, with handsome balconies and piazzas, bow windows and carved mouldings. Some of them served as head quarters for Marion and his men during our War of Independence. Everywhere you notice the lack of paint, that the damp salty air so soon destroys, but this mellows not mars the effect, which is that produced by some pictured town built in a past century. The court house and bank help to strengthen this impression, built of stone mildewed and gabled, with quaint winding secret steps and iron doors and rails; you find yourself dreaming of some "Dungeon Keep", and to rouse yourself to the active spirit in old fashioned surroundings, you have but to take a peep at the wharves, where industry and enterprise assert their own.

The Episcopal Church was built before the revolution, and colonial soldiers have tombs in its graveyard; and even the fathers of those soldiers sleep beneath the darkened stones. The church itself is of brick on a stone foundation. English ivy runs from top to bottom planted by hands that have turned to dust two centuries ago. The building is still solid and firm, but the ivy is eating out the hold of the brick and stone work; so now the town has resolved to gradually kill it; they have already commenced their work, and in

a few places the vines have withered. One hates to see its death struggle, it is but a choice been the ivy and the church, for the building will fall to pieces if the vine is preserved alive.

There is a little back history regarding the first settlers of Georgetown that interests the Jews, namely: that some of the most influential men were Israelites, and they used to have public worship here on the Sabbath, and on Saturday all their stores were closed. Many of these settlers afterwards moved to Savannah and a few to Charleston, and some of the best of our class spring from them. A small number reside here yet, but not enough to form a congregation, and on that account the habit of giving up business every sabbath has fallen into disuse.

I enjoy driving out extremely, for the roads leading into the country are excellent, being naturally hard and smooth. As yet, I have not tried the water though it looks enticing enough, lying just beneath the bluff almost at our very door, and actually swarming with small craft further along. I may let you know of some of my excursions, sails and rows, but just now this is all you can hear from your friend,

C. Cohen"