

## Museum Around the Corner

### The Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

#### Sea Cloud ©

An article in the Georgetown Times of November 12, 1997 harkened back to a time when life played out in a very different form than today. Mrs. Betty Roberson, Georgetown native and contributor to the Times penned the following article about the "*Sea Cloud*", a grand lady of the sea in its time.

"In November of 1934, the *Sea Cloud* came into port in Georgetown and tied up at the dock behind H. Kaminski's wholesale grocery and warehouse to lie up for the winter. She was more than 300 feet in length, with a beam of 50 feet. Her tallest mast of 185 feet stood as high as a 20-story building. The ship was virtually a floating palace, in a time when Georgetown and most of America staggered under the economic conditions of the Great Depression.

Her palatial staterooms with marble fireplaces, baths decorated in white and gold marble, with gold sink fixtures, seemed more like a mansion than a private yacht. The owner's extravagant touch extended from the walnut-paneled saloon, furnished with Queen Anne furniture and a brass chandelier, to the dark, geometrically-paneled dining room, reminiscent of a Scottish manor house, which could seat nearly 50 guests for a formal dinner.

The square-rigged, four-masted barque was built in Kiel, Germany, in 1931. Originally christened *Hussar*, the ship was designed in keeping with the opulent tastes of her original owners, E.F. Hutton [wealthy stock broker] and Marjorie Meriweather Post [heiress to the breakfast cereal empire]. In her early years, the Huttons cruised extensively to exotic ports on South America, North Africa, and Southern Europe. In April of 1935, the Georgetown Times reported that the Hutton's barque would remain in Georgetown for an indefinite period. The decision to leave the craft here was said to be because Georgetown's "climate is ideal, it doesn't rain too much, the air is clean and the river water is fresh." It was speculated that the war scare in Europe was the cause for this action and 12 of the crew departed voluntarily from the United States rather than be deported.

Just months after the Huttons divorced, a court settlement awarded the magnificent \$3.5 million yacht, to Mrs. Hutton. She ordered the name changed and everything bearing the name *Hussar* was done away with. The ship was then painted white and re-christened *Sea Cloud*.

It was then that 16 local men joined the crew of the *Sea Cloud*, which for some of them, began an adventure that would carry them all over the world. They were seamen J.L. Glymph, G. G. Sarvis, J. B. Shaw, R. P. Shuford, Jr., Prince Ballard, W. L. Butler, Auburn Altman, E.S. Enniss, Sr., Mitchell Griffin, and W.M. Outlaw, deck storekeeper W. W. Inman, wipers S. C. Crayton and W.E. Richardson; messmen Duke Newton, LaBruce Tamplet and Buck Jones; and oiler L. C. Jackson. They first set sail for Miami, where the ship would be boarded by Mrs. Hutton and her next husband, Joseph E. Davies, to embark on a honeymoon cruise.

Davies was appointed ambassador to Moscow by President Franklin Roosevelt, and the *Sea Cloud* arrived in Leningrad in July of 1937. These wealthy capitalists were received in great fanfare. *Sea Cloud* caused excitement as a diplomatic palace moored in the harbor of Leningrad. Mrs. Davies' flair for

entertaining made her dinners an unparalleled success and she received the singular honor of being asked to lunch by Madame Molotov.

Food and flowers were flown in regularly from Europe. In the freezing Russian winters during the purges, fresh-cut flowers and gourmet delights were rare. It was during this time that Edward VIII of England gave up his throne for the love of his wife, American Divorcee Wallis Warfield Simpson.

When George VI was crowned, members of *Sea Cloud's* crew were in the crowds witnessing his coronation parade. For a young man from small town America, it was a memorable event.

When *Sea Cloud* left Odessa in 1938, her last cruise before the start of World War II, she set sail for Istanbul. Then Ambassador Davies was appointed ambassador to Belgium and Queen Elizabeth of Belgium was entertained aboard. On many occasions, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor were guests. In 1938, *Sea Cloud* was tied up in Hamburg, Germany, when Hitler's troops marched into Austria and she made a hasty departure for the states. In October, 1940, she returned to Georgetown once again, tied at the Kaminski dock. In January, 1942, the war had been declared. The local men from her crew entered various branches of the military service. The *Sea Cloud* had been leased to the United States government for \$1 a year.

On the morning of January 8, she cast off her moorings from the dock, slowly headed downstream and out to sea. She set sail for Baltimore where she was turned over to the Navy and conditioned for duty. Stripped of all but the main mast, she was fitted with armor plating, deck guns and depth charges to go to war as "IX-99". The ship carried a crew of 150 and distinguished herself as a Coast Guard weathership. She was responsible for tracking several German u-boats and is one of the few private yachts ever to receive military honors.

While Georgetown as a whole felt some claim to the luxurious sailing yacht, my interest is enhanced by many fascinating stories I heard from my brother, Robert P. Shuford, who put to sea with her as a seaman in 1935 and returned with her as a 3<sup>rd</sup> mate in 1940.

I have also talked to others who spent varying amounts of time traveling as crewmen. Sam Crayton and Prince Ballard, who still live in Georgetown, were helpful with their recollections.

*Sea Cloud* spent two Christmases in Georgetown and the sight of a lighted tree atop her highest mast is probably one of the most vivid memories of Georgetonians who recall her long-ago visits. Louis Turbe even recalled that the tree was made for the mast by a Danish sailmaker in the crew. After the war, the Coast Guard returned the *Sea Cloud* to her owners. She underwent a complete refit and they resumed their lavish style of cruising and entertaining aboard, until she was sold in 1955.

From then to now, she passed through several ownerships and a period of being mothballed in Panama. Then she was resurrected, re-christened *Sea Cloud* and lovingly restored and refurbished. The *Sea Cloud* is a survivor of an era when yachts were built to serve as monuments to power, wealth and personal indulgence.