

Museum Around the Corner

Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

While perusing the Georgetown newspapers of the 1800s, stories and advertisements shed some light on what citizens did for pleasure and entertainment. Visits to beach areas were a popular pastime then, as now. Weekly reports of who was aboard the steam boats at the Market Wharf headed for North or South Island listed the names of passengers. For a while, North Island boasted a village with many homes. According to Robert "Mac" McAlister in his book, North Island, A History, ... "the summer population would swell to nearly 700, according to one account, and a new church was built in 1826." The newspaper of June 14, 1843 mentions, "Trip aboard the Steamer Anson reports decay of houses at North Island and abandonment of settlement because of illness. South Island is a pleasant summer retreat."

An early village was named La Grange and another Lafayette, in honor of the landing of the Marquis de Lafayette on North Island on June 22, 1777. His footsteps on this beach were his first in the colonies. Over time, a village was built on South Island mirroring that of North Island.

Storms periodically raged through the area, devastating these villages, but the draw was strong to rebuild and continue the annual trek. Finally, after the War Between the States, the dire economic situation put an end to rebuilding after storms and because taxes went unpaid, the North Island and South Island land was sold by 1884. After that time, day excursions were advertised in the newspapers and romantic moonlight voyages culminated in dances on North Island, the steamer returning at midnight. Round trip tickets were 25 cents.

Pawleys Island has always been a popular resort since the 1700s. Because of the rise of mosquitos in March and April, residents would leave their homes and move to the Island. They would not return home until the late fall when cold weather had come to diminish the mosquito population.

With the rise of the Atlantic Coast Lumber Company, begun around the turn of the 20th Century, a railroad was built from Hagley Landing to Pawleys Island. Commuters would catch the steamer at a Front Street wharf to be ferried to Hagley where the train was waiting. This commute was repeated in reverse in the morning. A large mural is displayed in the Georgetown County Museum of the Strollers Club, a group of friends who met regularly to stroll the beach in formal attire. Men are dressed in wool suits and ladies in long dresses with long sleeves on August 17, 1902. Photographs of life on Pawleys and the ACL train can be seen online at the Georgetown Digital Library.

Other forms of entertainment were advertised in the Georgetown Gazette.

June 10, 1801 "A Theatrical group from Charleston to perform 'She Stoops to Conquer' subtitled 'The Mistakes of a Night' and 'The Virgin Unmasked' subtitled 'An Old Man Taught Wisdom'. Mr. Cuttino assures us that the Courthouse has been inspected and is safe for occupancy. "

November 11, 1801 an advertisement announces Rickett's Circus on the 12th.

11-14-1801 "Subscribers of the Georgetown Races will attend Matthew's Tavern on the 21st to form a Jockey Club and make rules for its government." The Georgetown Racetrack was found near the Parade Ground on Wood Street. This was the edge of town, the last street on the west side.

February 1, 1845 "Auction: Valuable Lot in Scriven [sic] Street : 2 story house & kitchen, brick ice house, and the building known as the Alley Club containing two 10-pin alleys and two fine mahogany billiard tables in the rear."

Georgetown also boasted of the Steele Opera House and the Standard Opera House in the late 1800s across the street from one another. They were both located in the 800 block of Front Street. These venues offered a variety of entertainment. Competitions and celebrations were held often and for a variety of reasons, but therein lies another story.