

## Museum Around the Corner

### Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

On March 1, 1865, occupation by Union forces took effect in Georgetown. While using the Winyah Indigo Society Hall on Prince Street as a hospital for Union soldiers, many items were stolen. Thanks to Jimmy Elliott and Charlie Luquire for their research into the loss of a treasure, we now know the story of its disappearance and current location. Here is Jimmy's and Charlie's story.

“ In the waning days of the war, on April 9, 1865 General Robert E. Lee surrendered. For the next three years Federal Forces occupied Georgetown and the Winyah Indigo Society building, which they used as a hospital. During this period the Society held its meetings at the Court House each Spring.

Needless to say the building was very much abused when the soldiers left in 1868. At this time, the Winyah Indigo Society was broke and their building was in need of repairs. They tried to collect payment for the use and damage of their building by the federal troops, but were unsuccessful. It wasn't until 1872 that they reopened the Winyah Indigo Society School.

The Federals also took many of the Society's possessions. Only a few volumes remained of the 1,800 volume library. Their best and most valuable works had been carried off.

Probably the most prized possession stolen by the Federal troops was the Audubon book titled - “The Birds of America”. John James Audubon accumulated his great works between 1827 and 1838 - 11 years. Experts estimate that about 180 complete books were published - each containing 435 pictures approximately 26 by 39 inches. Because of the large size of the prints in the book it is also referred to as the “Double Elephant Folio”. The double elephant folio book cost around \$1,000.

Richard O. Anderson of Georgetown was the owner of an original volume of Audubon's “Birds of America”. He was the owner of Ramsey Grove Plantation and in 1824 he also purchased Keithfield Plantation on the Black River. That same year he became a member of the Winyah Indigo Society. Later he presented the Audubon folio to the Georgetown Library Society. This volume was included in the collection of books they donated to the Winyah Indigo Society in 1850.

Today the inventory of the Library of Congress shows two sets of plates of John James Audubon's “Birds of America” collection. One set is unbound and the other is bound and in its original state.

In 1959, Dr. F. A. Bell initiated a search for the lost Audubon book on behalf of the Society. He had received a letter from W. H. Fries, a Rhode Island researcher who had been trying to locate all of the original volumes of Audubon's works. In a letter, Fries stated that he was convinced that one of the two copies in the Library of Congress' possession was indeed the original that was issued to Richard O. Anderson of Georgetown County.

Dr. Bell passed this information on to Georgetown State Senator James B. Morrison who in turn enlisted the help of U. S. Senator Strom Thurmond who requested that the Library of Congress investigate this.

The folio under investigation in the Library of Congress archives had been presented to the library by Maj. Gen. W. D. Conner in 1929. At that time, he was the commander of the old War College in Washington. He had found the “Double Elephant” volume in the army files. Many of the prints in the book are rubber stamped with the words “War Department Library”. Dr. Bell was unsuccessful in his efforts to recover the Winyah Indigo Society book. In 2010 a double elephant folio sold for \$10.3 million.”

There are more items that have disappeared over time whose stories will be the subject of future articles.