

Museum Around the Corner

The Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

William Doyle Morgan (C)

William Doyle Morgan probably loved his adopted city of Georgetown more because he was not born here, but chose to live here. He was actually born on February 5, 1853 in New York, the son of immigrant parents from Ireland. His father, John, was attracted to South Carolina because his brother, Arthur, had brought his family to Georgetown. Arthur was a successful businessman and ship owner and a well respected member of the community. John arrived with his wife, Mary, his oldest son, William Doyle, and three daughters.

William attended local schools, and when his father died in 1865, he was cast into the role of “Man of the family” at the tender age of thirteen. He worked various jobs, but spent every extra moment studying and reading. He taught himself the art of accounting, and soon was hired as a bookkeeper. At the age of seventeen, he was appointed assistant postmaster, his first official position. For the next ten years, his reputation as a precise bookkeeper grew. He began to take on more financial responsibilities.

He passed one trial of endurance when on Thanksgiving Day of 1878, his gun accidentally discharged, injuring his left hand beyond repair. Amputation resulted, but William continued to pursue an active life with an artificial hand.

The family home was located at 732 Prince Street. He supported his mother and sisters there. He worked for a local drug store, and eventually went to work for Heiman Kaminski at his store. William became a founding member of the Palmetto Club and joined the Winyah Indigo Society. He never married, instead adopting the town and its people as his extended family. He began to study the problems of Georgetown, noting that the lack of a rail link and the sandbar at the mouth of Winyah Bay held us back economically.

He became Intendant of Georgetown in 1891, and one of his first acts was to charter the town as a city, thus becoming the first Mayor. A new railroad sparked a revival of commerce and Walter Hazard informed his readers of the Georgetown Times newspaper, “We await the sound of the iron horse whose scream is to set all her arteries throbbing with the quick pulsations of a new commercial life.” Mayor Morgan also secured dredging of Winyah Bay, opening the port to increased maritime business. He continued improving his city by opening the Bank of Georgetown in November of 1892, the first institution since the failure of the bank during the War Between the States.

Morgan continued as Mayor until 1906. Upon his retirement, “a grateful citizenry” presented him with a silver punchbowl, now on display at the Georgetown County Museum.

One interesting story in the March 13, 1914 edition of the Georgetown Times recounted an almost miraculous escape from death by Morgan.

Georgetown, March 13, 1914 – By the narrowest margin the Hon. W.D. Morgan, ex-mayor and president of the Bank of Georgetown, escaped death in horrible form on Wednesday. Only his presence of mind

and quick action saved him from being smashed by the locomotive of a log train with which his automobile collided at the Sampit Road crossing, four miles from town.

Mr. Morgan was himself at the wheel of his car. On the same seat was his chauffeur to look in one direction while he looked in the other for the possible approach of a train. The road crosses the track diagonally, so it was necessary to look backward in one direction and forward in the other to see up and down the track.

When Mr. Morgan himself took the backward view, the log train, followed by the Marion Branch passenger train, was almost upon the crossing and running at a pretty good rate of speed. The automobile was moving at low speed, but it was just enough to take the machine on the crossing at just the same time the locomotive would get there.

Seeing the peril of the situation and realizing that instant action was essential, Mr. Morgan called to the chauffeur to jump. But the chauffeur, apparently frozen in fear, did not move. Mr. Morgan thereupon quickly sprang over the man's knees and jumped to the ground. So close was he to the track that he had to jump backward to save himself from being hit by the engine. The brake was not set on the automobile and the machine kept on, with the chauffeur in it. The forepart of the locomotive struck the rear wheel and body of the car and threw it about 25 feet.

The chauffeur went out of the machine as if from a catapult and landed on his head in a ditch. The auto stopped at the edge of the ditch. Had it fallen on the man he must have been killed outright. He was severely bruised and will be laid up for a number of days. No bone was broken.

Conductor Murphy stopped the passenger train at the scene of the accident and offered any assistance in his power. The chauffeur was sent to town on the train.

By happy fortune Mr. Morgan sustained no injury save a shaking up. He caught on his feet when he jumped which showed agility for a man in his sixties. He caught a passing buggy and continued on to his farm a couple of miles distant. At the farm he secured a team and was driven to town. The automobile was pretty thoroughly wrecked. One wheel was smashed and torn off, the springs were bent under the body, both axles were bent and the body was crushed at the rear.