

Museum Around the Corner

Georgetown County Historical Society and Museum

President Washington Visits Georgetown ©

As our readers may remember, we wrote an article a few months ago about the five American presidents who visited Georgetown. George Washington was here just as he began his second term as president in 1791. His purpose was to visit cities and towns in the former southern colonies to see how the fledgling government was working. He left a journal about this trip that was published in 1861 by the Virginia Historical Society for private circulation. His observations were about the people he met, the nature of the country, and the society of the state. Here are extracts pertinent to Georgetown and surrounding area.

“Wednesday, 27 April - 1791 Breakfast at William Gana’s, a little out of the direct road – 14 miles. Crossed the boundary line between North and South Carolina about half past 12 o’clock, which is 12 miles from Gana’s. Dined at a private house (one Cochran’s), about two miles farther, and lodged at Mr. Vereen’s, 13 miles more, and two miles short the long bay. To this house we were directed as a tavern, but the proprietor of it either did not keep one or would not acknowledge it. We there were entertained (and very kindly) without being able to make compensation.

Thursday, 28 April, 1791 – Mr. Vereen piloted us across a wash (which at high water is impassable and at times by the shifting of the sand, dangerous) on the long beach on the ocean and it being at a proper time of the tide we passed along it with ease and alacrity, to the place of quitting it, which is estimated at 16 miles. Five miles from this we got dinner and fed our horses at a Mr. Pawley’s, a private house, no public one being on the road; and being met on the road and very kindly invited to dinner by Dr. Flagg to his house, we lodged there, it being about 10 miles from Pawley’s and 33 from Vereen’s.

Friday, April 29, 1791 – We left Dr. Flagg’s about six o’clock and arrived at Captain William Allston’s on the Waggermaw [sic] to breakfast. Captain Allston is a gentleman of large fortune and one of the neatest rice planters in the State of South Carolina, and a proprietor of the most valuable ground for the culture of this article. His house, which is large and new, and elegantly furnished, stands on a sand hill, high for the country, with his rice fields below, the contrast of which, with the lands back of it, and the sands and piney barrens through which we had passed, is scarcely to be considered. At Captain Allston’s we were met by General Moultrie, Colonel Washington and Mr. Rutledge (son of the present Chief Justice of South Carolina) who had come out that far to escort me to town. We dined and lodged at this gentleman’s and boats being provided, we then left next morning.

Saturday, April 30, 1791 – Crossed the Waggermaw to Georgetown, descending the river 3 miles. At this place we were received under a salute of cannon and by a Company of Infantry handsomely uniformed, I dined with the citizens in public, and in the afternoon was introduced to upwards of 50 ladies who had assembled (to a Tea Party) on the occasion.

Georgetown seems to be in the shade of Charleston. It suffered during the war by the British having had many of its houses burnt. It is situated on a peninsula between the River Waccamaw and Sampton [sic] Creek, out fifteen miles from the sea. A bar is to be passed over which is not more than 12 feet of water can be brought, except at spring tides; which (tho. [sic] the inhabitants are willing to entertain different

ideas) must ever be a considerable let to its importance; especially if the canal between the Santee and Cooper Rivers should ever be accomplished.

The inhabitants of this place (either unwilling or unable) could give no account of the number of souls in it, but I should not compute them at more than five or six hundred. Its chief export, rice.

Sunday, May 1st, 1791 – Left Georgetown about 6 o'clock and crossing the Santee Creek (*probably Sampit*) at the town, and the Santee River 12 miles from it at Lynch's Island we breakfasted and dined at Mrs. Horry's, about 15 miles from Georgetown, and lodged at the plantation of Mrs. Manigold [sic], about 19 miles farther."

President Washington proceeded on to Charleston to be royally entertained by dignitaries and old friends from the days of the recent war and by leaders of South Carolina.