

Museum Around the Corner

The Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

Confederate Flag from Fort Sumter ©

An article in the Georgetown Times of January 10, 1957 reports the accession of a rare piece of American history to the Georgetown County Historical Society. The gift was given to the society by Mr. and Mrs. Russell Doar. It has been handed down for generations in their family. The relic is part of the historic flag that was shot from its flag staff during the conflict at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor on January 30, 1864. Yes, the year is 1864, later in the war. Fort Sumter was attacked twice!

Previously, on Friday, April 12, 1861, at 4:30 a.m., Confederate batteries opened fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, firing for 34 straight hours on the fort. Union Army forces inside the fort under the command of Major Robert Anderson, could not return artillery fire because their big guns were atop the fort and therefore the soldiers would be fully exposed to danger. So they defended the fort with smaller, protected cannons which did little to effect the Confederates. Finally, into the third day, a cease fire was called, the white flag of surrender run up the flagpole and the Union troops were allowed to leave honorably. No casualties were reported on either side, but the worst was yet to come in a short time as the War Between the States erupted into full hostilities. Three years later, the fort was occupied by Confederate forces this time, when again in the predawn hours of January 30, 1864, cannons again opened fire on the already heavily damaged walls. As the battle progressed, the flagstaff bearing the Confederate flag was hit. The flag sagged, almost to the ground when a daring rescue was launched. One of the rescuers received the flag and tore it into quarters to distribute it to his family. One of those pieces is here in the Georgetown County Museum.

From the Georgetown Times article, "This [remnant of the Confederate flag] is part of that which was shot down from its flag staff during the conflict at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. According to the historic date, the flag was shot down on January 30, 1864. Adjutant Bentivoglio Middleton, together with Shafer, Banks, and Brassingham of Lucas' Battalion, sprang over the ramparts, rescued and held the flag aloft until they were replaced. The fort was a shambles after the assaults over the course of the war. The Confederates continued to salvage guns and other material from the ruins and harassed the Union batteries on Morris Island with sharpshooters. The Confederates mounted four 10-inch (250 mm) columbiads, one 8-inch (200 mm) columbiad rifled, and two rifled 42-pounders, in the left face, bottom tier casemates. The last Confederate commander, Major Thomas A. Huguenin, a graduate from The Citadel, The Military College of South Carolina, never surrendered Fort Sumter, but General William Tecumseh Sherman's advance through South Carolina finally forced the Confederates to evacuate Charleston on February 17, 1865, and abandon Fort Sumter. The Federal government formally took possession of Fort Sumter on February 22, 1865. On April 14, 1865, mere hours before President Lincoln's assassination, Major Robert Anderson (now a major general) returned to Fort Sumter with the flag he had been forced to lower after the surrender four years earlier in 1861, and raised it in triumph over the ruined fort.

On his first visit to his home after the war, Middleton divided the torn and splintered remnants among his people. Parts of this flag are still held as priceless mementos among this family.

Bentivoglie Middleton was brought to this country by his uncle just before the outbreak of the War Between the States. His mother, Mrs. Arthur Middleton (nee Comtesse Paola Bentivoglie of Rome) lived with her daughter Angelina after the death of her husband.

Mrs. Middleton reluctantly consented to "Benti's" coming to the land of his paternal forefathers at such a hazardous time. During the battles for the Confederacy, Benti was constantly exposed and held dangerous positions, but was never wounded.

He was stationed at one time in Fort Sumter during the main sites of fighting around this famous fort. It was then that the story of his rescue of the fallen flag came about.

The flag the Georgetown County Museum holds appears to be the upper corner toward the flag staff. It measures 12 inches by 15 inches. On this section, one star, part of the blue cross-bar, and some of the red field is shown. It has signs of the battle.

Benti's family is one that has displayed patriotism, bravery and affluence. His grandfather, Henry Middleton, was President of the Continental Congress. His son, Arthur, was Charge d' Affairs of the United States in Madrid. Arthur's second marriage was to Paola (Pauline), daughter of General Count Bentivoglio. Arthur died in Naples in 1853. Benti succeeded his father as the head of the Middleton family, and received his early education at the South Carolina Military Academy in Charleston, and in Paris. It was upon his return to Rome at the close of the Civil War that he met and married the beautiful Beatrice, Countess Cini of Rome, a member of one of the oldest and proudest Roman families and a niece of Pope Leo. He moved in the most aristocratic circles in Rome and was highly respected everywhere. Benti possesses the Italian title of Count of Bentivoglio secured from his mother who was an Italian Noblewoman. His full name is Henry Bentivoglio Van Ness Middleton.