

Museum Around the Corner

The Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

Parrott Shell (C)

In the files at the Georgetown County Museum, several articles were found concerning a piece of Civil War history. There is no name attributed to one article, and the other is by Chris Rees, but date and time are unknown. They spotlight the village of Murrells Inlet during the War Between the States. Here are excerpts of those articles.

“Originally, what is now Brookgreen Gardens was four rice plantations. The plantations from north to south were The Oaks, Brookgreen, Springfield, and Laurel Hill. The current gardens and surrounding facilities lie completely on the former Brookgreen Plantation, which was owned by Confederate Captain Joshua John Ward. Josh Ward was elected captain of the Waccamaw Light Artillery battery on January 20, 1862, and resigned on July 18, 1864, because chronic liver problems gave him repeated attacks of fever and chills, which rendered him unfit for service. Ward added that he wished to go to Europe for a change of scene or climate. His physician attested that Ward suffered from malarial poisoning and an organic derangement of the liver. Mayham Ward succeeded him as captain of August 6, 1864, and commanded the company until the end of the war. Only a handful of relics survive the former plantations. The Alston-Allston cemetery survives on the grounds of The Oaks plantation. Governor Joseph Alston and his child are buried in the cemetery. The same grave is a memorial to the governor’s wife, Theodosia Burr Alston, daughter of Vice President Aaron Burr, who was lost at sea. The rice mill at Laurel Hill is all that remains of the plantation today. During the Civil War, Confederates built an earthen structure on the grounds to block Union ships from coming into the tidal waters.

Early in the war, when the first forts had been built, Murrells Inlet had been fortified as well. Named Fort Ward in honor of planter Captain Joshua John Ward, the earthworks contained three guns and were initially manned by soldiers from Smith’s battalion, which later became the twenty-sixth South Carolina Regiment. A letter from Major William Capers White dated April 13, 1861, noted that he deployed twenty-six men and two officers of the Wachesaw Riflemen to the redoubt at Murrells Inlet. Fort Ward was built when the district was under the direct command of General Robert E. Lee.

With the exception of the Waccamaw Light Artillery and a couple of companies of the state troops that would later become part of the Fourth and Seventh South Carolina Cavalry, the district was almost undefended by mid-April of 1862. Fort Ward was decommissioned and stripped of its artillery.

During the Civil War, South Carolina and the rest of the South were put in a foreign trade strangle with a massive blockade by the Union Navy. Ports were all but shut down and much needed military supplies, as well as basic human needs were cut off in a new method of war made infamous by General William Sherman: Total War.

To try to keep this vital link open, the Confederates engaged blockade runners to smuggle in the goods so desperately needed by the South. In exchange for the imports, Southerners would trade the few goods they had, like cotton, tobacco, and salt.

The South Carolina coast was a hotbed of activity for these blockade runners. The many bays, inlets, and rivers made for more safe havens than could be constantly watched by the Union Navy. The Murrells Inlet area of South Carolina's coast has many documented skirmishes and naval engagements.

Many incidents similar to the one below tell of Union ships shelling cotton bales and salt barrels near the loading docks awaiting embarkation to blockade runners. The following quote is paraphrased from the Official Records of Union and Confederates in the War of the Rebellion, 31 Volumes, Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894-1927:

"Report of Acting Volunteer Lieutenant Baxter, commanding U.S. bark *Gem of the Sea*, regarding affairs in the vicinity of Georgetown, S.C., and the destruction of salt works, July 19-21, 1862.

"Sir: I proceeded with the *Western World* to Murrells Inlet where we found extensive salt works on the mainland capable of making 30 to 40 bushels of salt per day, belonging to John LaBruce, who is a strong secessionist, and destroyed them. While we were in the act of destroying them, we were fired upon by a party of twenty-five rebels who were secreted in the wood."

The Parrott Rifle and the Parrott round were developed by Robert Parker Parrott, an officer in the U.S. Army. They were used extensively by both sides during the war. Many were used aboard ships, terrifying the soldiers by the carnage that they wreaked on men and equipment. These were used in the shelling of Murrells Inlet in destroying fortifications and the salt works.

In July of 2004, a child found what was thought to be a cannon shell in the Murrells Inlet area on land that had once been a salt mine and near debarkation points for blockade runners. The shell was subsequently brought to the Georgetown Sheriff's Office where a SLED Bomb Squad was summoned to make a determination as to the inherent danger this black powder fill round possessed. The shell was stored for safe-keeping and it was later decided by all parties that the round should be identified, rendered safe, and displayed in an appropriate museum.

With the valuable assistance from the USC School of Archaeology and Anthropology, a SLED Bomb Technician determined that the round was a 20 pound Parrott Case Shot of the 1860's era. The explosive material was removed and a lengthy preservation process ensued. The round is currently on display at the Georgetown County Museum.