

## Museum Around the Corner

### Georgetown County Historical Society and Museum

#### The Harvest Moon ©

Winyah Bay has the distinction of being the only place to embrace the remains of a Federal flagship sunk during the War Between the States, the USS Harvest Moon. Originally built as a commercial and passenger vessel in 1863 in Portland, Maine, she was purchased by the U.S. Navy on November 16, 1863 for \$99,300. She was fitted out for blockade duty at the Boston Navy Yard and arrived in Charleston on February 25, 1864. The next day, Rear Admiral John A. Dahlgren claimed her as his flagship.

She began her blockading duties off Charleston, Tybee Island, the North Edisto River. By February 28, 1865, she was in Winyah Bay, near Georgetown. The story can be found in an address of Col. J. Harleston Read delivered May 2, 1896.

“After talking with some of Georgetown’s oldest citizens, I have been able to get some information and data about a Union gun boat, “Harvest Moon.” Perhaps few of us this quarter of the twentieth century know the tragic end of the Harvest Moon, which was blown up in our harbor near Fraser’s Point on the first day of March, 1865 at 7:45 in the morning.

“The Harvest Moon was the Flag-ship of Rear Admiral J.A. Dahlgren of the United States Navy and was blown up by a torpedo [mine] made with a keg of powder and exploded with a percussion cap. This torpedo was made and placed in the channel by Captain Thomas W. Daggett, who was at that time Captain of the coast defense from Little River, SC to Georgetown. The Harvest Moon had been lying near Georgetown until the afternoon of February 28, when Admiral Dahlgren dropped down to Battery White, intending to look after the work and leave the next day.

“Early in the morning of March 1<sup>st</sup>, the Harvest Moon weighed anchor and steamed down the Bay. She had not proceeded far when an explosion took place. The Admiral was awaiting breakfast in his cabin when instantly a loud noise and a terrible shock occurred, when the bulk head which separated the cabin from the ward room, was driven in toward the cabin. There was naturally some confusion for it was evident that the vessel was sinking and she was not long in reaching the bottom. It took but five minutes for the ship to sink in 2 ½ fathoms of water for the explosion had blown a hole through the starboard quarter tearing away the main deck over it.

“The Admiral and his staff went on the Tug “Clover” which went immediately to their assistance. The ship’s officers remained on the ill-fated vessel to save everything possible. One life was lost, that of John Hazzard, who was in the hold at the time of the explosion. Owing to the singular fortunate fact that the action of the torpedo occurred in the open space between the gangways occupied by no one and where few linger save for a moment. Had it occurred further aft or forward the consequence would have been fatal to many.

“Not until after April 21<sup>st</sup> was the wreck abandoned, when the crew, with everything that could be saved was moved to Battery White.

“The torpedo that did the work was made on the second floor of one of the oldest Georgetown stores, owned at that time by Mr. S.W. Rouquie, Sr., a Confederate veteran, but at the present the property of the late Mr. H. Kaminski, also a Confederate veteran.”

In 1963, nearly 100 years later, a field unit from the New England Naval and Maritime Museum, Newport, Rhode Island, explored the Harvest Moon and began an investigation as to what remained. Studies indicate that, “she lies extraordinarily well preserved in its cocoon of mud on the bottom of the Bay.” A project was initiated to raise the Harvest Moon and to restore the ship, but little progress was made. The U.S. Navy formally abandoned the USS Harvest Moon on February 25, 1964. This was 100 years to the day that Admiral Dahlgren claimed her as his flagship. Today, the top of the smokestack can be seen at low tide, rising a few feet above the surface of Winyah Bay.

In the Georgetown County Museum, we have a copy of the shop’s log of that fateful day and much more information about the Harvest Moon and the taking of Georgetown by the Union Navy.