

Museum Around the Corner

Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

Dr. F.A. Bell ©

If you were born between 1906 and 1945 here in Georgetown, chances are Dr. F.A. Bell was in attendance. Dr. Bell himself once said he thought he delivered about 2,500 babies, and that was years before he gave up obstetrics to set up an office practice. An article in the International Paper Company newsletter called him “the Doctor who delivered Georgetown”. All told, he delivered over 4,000 babies and not one of them was born in a hospital.

Miss Elizabeth Sims wrote an 8th Grade essay about Dr. Bell as an English assignment as her most admired person. She wrote, “Sixty years ago, my great grandmother’s father and his brother decided that they needed a medical doctor to help them on their plantations. So they wrote to the Medical College of Virginia and Dr. Francis Arthur Bell of Boston came.” This turned out to be one of the most fortunate strokes of luck for both Dr. Bell and Georgetown.

Dr. Bell began his practice in the Sampit Community traveling on horseback. He soon began using a horse drawn buggy and eventually purchased one of few automobiles in Georgetown, a two-cylinder Maxwell. He paid the handsome sum of \$750.

He initially felt that his stay in Georgetown was just a stepping stone until he could join the Navy. He left Georgetown in 1911 to serve with the State Board of Health for 3 years, then took a tour of medical duty along the Mexican border. He then began to pine for the southern charm he felt in Georgetown and hurried back to open an office in the back of Iseman Drug Store. He never left. He entered into a love affair with Georgetown and the compliment was returned. Even though he was from Boston, no one considered him a Yankee.

Anne Baxter Hudson came into the Museum recently with a newspaper clipping and photograph of Dr. Bell and written on the back was “Dr. F.A. Bell, My Doctor” in her adolescent handwriting. Such were the feelings and devotion felt by many Georgetown residents for him. On June 6, 1917 he married Miss Ida Ford. They found the secret to a happy marriage and Dr. Bell unfailingly presented her with a gift on the 6th of every month to celebrate the occasion.

Many Georgetownians bear all or part of Dr. Bell’s name. Well known resident Jeep Ford is actually Francis Bell Ford, a nephew of Dr. Bell. Many proud new parents gave Dr. Bell the honor of naming their infant. There are the usual Johns, Jims, Marys and Sallys, but some are named after a place or event. There is Tunisia Brown, born at the height of World War II when North Africa was a hot spot of military activity, and Haley’s Comet Davis, born during the exact hour in 1912 when the comet came closest to the earth.

Being a man of boundless energy, he was a student of local history and became an authority on the subject. The Bells collected many fine antiques. He took it upon himself to try to track down some of the lost treasures taken during the occupation by Union troops during the Reconstruction period. It was he who found the John James Audubon’s Double Elephant Folio of his Birds of America stolen from the Winyah Indigo Society. It was in the Library of Congress and worth \$10 million. He could not secure its return, being designated “spoils of war”.

The Bells often had an open door policy and entertained frequent drop-ins, usually children. A hug, a kind word, even a meal awaited them. If a visitor arrived near a meal time, Mrs. Bell always had enough for everyone. Dr. Bell considered her the best cook in town.

Retirement was not in the vocabulary of Dr. Bell. "He won't slow down", complained his wife. He considered retirement the lazy man's way of doing things. After 50 years of working, he felt anything but work would seem dull in comparison. On April 26, 1963, he finally did slow down. His passing brought many a tear to folks of every age, and to this day, he is still remembered as "my doctor".