

Museum Around the Corner

Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

Winyah Bay has always been too shallow and too muddy to allow big trading vessels to reach Georgetown. Therefore, Georgetown never surpassed the small town size in its first 250 years. We are grateful now to have our appealing, laid back ambiance as opposed to the hustle and bustle of larger cities. In order to get our many products exported, we built our own shallow draft vessels that could successfully navigate Winyah Bay and the treacherous sand bar at the mouth of the Atlantic Ocean and on to Charleston. This first industry of building these barge-like vessels went on until about 1773.

In addition, we also exported ship building materials known as “naval stores” including oak and pine products. The sap of the pine tree was collected in clay vessels and kept in barrels. These clay vessels can be seen in a display at the Georgetown County Museum. The pine rosin was distilled into turpentine. Other products from pine trees were used as important caulking and sealing agents.

A chevron pattern, known as “cat faces”, was cut into the bark of pine trees so that the sap dripped down the point or “nose”. We have an adze, a piece of tree branch that is in a 45 degree angle with a blade attached that was used to remove the bark.

Although we do not know where the ship yards were located, they had to have been found along the Sampit River. A large wharf was built at the foot of Cannon Street when we became an International Port of Entry in 1732. It could handle five sailing ships. In 1752, lot 230 at the foot of Cannon Street was sold to Mr. Benjamin Darling, shipwright, from Boston, so this is a possible site. It is from this port on the Sampit that Theodosia Burr Alston departed Georgetown, never to be seen again. Her fate is unknown, but that is another story.

Even though Winyah Bay is too shallow, too muddy to allow the large trading ships in, many medium vessels from around the world called here. From the Georgetown newspapers of 1801, traffic in the port was reported. Ships entering Georgetown harbor were from Nassau, Gloucester, Antigua, Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, and New York. Departing ships were headed for Bermuda, Martinique, Madiera, Havana, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Newport, Lisbon, and Barbados. The cargo carried aboard these vessels make for interesting reading and give clues about the lifestyle of Georgetonians.