

Museum Around the Corner

Georgetown County Museum

Mike Johnson Field ©

Sports have occupied the free time of people since history has been recorded. In Georgetown, the name of the game was baseball. A ball field was opened by 1893 called the Georgetown County Stadium. The Georgetown Times ran a story on July 29, 1893 reporting that the City Council has prohibited enclosing the field with a fence. However, almost a year later, on March 10, 1894 an article read, "The Georgetown baseball team will be in the field this year under the management of Mr. J.T. Taylor, of the Porter Military Academy...Georgetown's ball grounds are fenced in and are quite able to rival the Charleston grounds in smoothness."

Temporarily moved "to one of the Walker lots recently filled in on Front Street" in 1906, it was again moved to an open field next to the waterworks station near the corner of Front and Cleland a few months later. A high fence had been placed around it and "a splendid grandstand and a fine diamond laid off".

We are not sure when the field was moved to its present location on Emanuel Street. It was known as the Atlantic Coast Lumber Company (A.C.L.) Park. On August 24, 1908, the A.C.L. baseball team played the married men's team at 5 o'clock. Results were not reported. In September, Georgetown played the Lake City team resulting in a score of 7 to 6 in favor of Lake City.

On August 27, 1913 the newspaper reported, "The Navy Yard baseball team came over here from Charleston day before yesterday to lick the High School team. They did it. But when the visitors got out of the scrimmage they knew that they had seen a ball game, and that they had been up against about the grittiest bunch of youngsters that could be found in a day's journey. (Final score was 3-0.)

In the 1920s baseball rose in popularity nationwide. Professional teams had their winter camps in Florida and when traveling back to their home bases would sometimes stop along the way to play local teams. This happened in Georgetown occasionally, giving our local boys some stiff competition. By the 1940s, the semi-pro Palmetto League was created and sponsored by the Loyal Motor Company. A tin fence surrounded the park by this time.

In the 1950s the Palmetto League was very popular. The stadium was refurbished by International Paper Company who replaced the tin fence with a concrete one and installed a scoreboard.

In 1989 the City of Georgetown passed a resolution to rename the stadium Mike Johnson Park, recognizing his personal dedication to making the stadium one of the state's finest. International Paper Company financed a portion of the renovations including a replica of the original scoreboard in left field.

Debby Johnson Summey, a niece of popular coach Mike Johnson, helped to have an historical marker created and installed at the field during the Georgetown County Historical Society's Smithsonian Exhibit "Hometown Teams" spotlighting sports in America. She wrote, "Now named Mike Johnson Park, it is located on the live oak-lined Emanuel Street in Georgetown, and has a homey, historic feel not found in modern ballparks."

Now modernized with updated stands, nighttime lighting, and comfortable dugouts, Mike Johnson Park is home to the International Paper Baseball Classic tournament every year. Teams from all over the region play here. Winners go on to play in prestigious tournaments leading to Championships.

Just to show the level of enthusiasm for baseball in its early days, a report was made that "Mr. John S. Beaty is having built a modern cottage on St. James Street. Mr. Beaty was a great walker. He attended all baseball games that were held on summer evenings at the ball park by International Company, a distance of two miles from his house. He always walked to the park. If he got disgusted with the home team performance, he would walk home only to turn around and walk back to check on progress. It must have done him a lot of good as he was active to the last of his 91 years. "