

Museum Around the Corner

Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

Pied Piper Malone ©

In August of 2005, John Coles and Mark Tiedje of Mount Pleasant, SC began a search for a copy of a Hollywood movie filmed here in Georgetown. It was titled "Pied Piper Malone" and starred Thomas Meighan and Lois Wilson who were well known actors in November of 1923. Mr. Cole and Mr. Tiedje were writing a book about movie theaters and films made in South Carolina. Through the Eastman House Museum in Rochester, NY they finally found that one copy of the movie did indeed exist – at Gosfilmofund Archives in Moscow, Russia! Through negotiations and payment of fees to make a copy of the film, it finally arrived in Georgetown. A synopsis of the plot is that the hero returns to his hometown, falls for the lovely school teacher, finds he has some competition for her affections, is falsely accused, and is redeemed. Of course, he wins the girl. Children seem to be affectionately drawn to him, thus the title of Pied Piper Malone.

Enter Debby Summey, then the Director of the Georgetown County Museum. The excitement of the discovery was contagious. The Historical Society, who operated the Museum, agreed to pay the fees for the copying of the film to DVD. Debby and other Georgetown enthusiasts began making plans for what could to be done to celebrate the return of this treasure. The first hurdle was that the subtitles were in Russian. A translator was found in Charleston and Mr. Marty Tennant was asked to apply the English translated subtitles to the DVD. At last, the movie was ready for its second debut in a Georgetown Theater.

The first showing of Pied Piper Malone was at its release on February 4, 1924 at the Princess Theater. The second debut came 82 years later, on March 25, 2006 at the Strand Theater. Ironically, the Strand stands on the exact location of the Princess Theater.

There were a few people still living in 2006 that were used as extras in the filming. They arrived at a reception honoring the film in an antique limousine and were treated like royalty. Mrs. Mildred Cooper Higgins and Mrs. Mamie Dalzell were around ten years old at the time of the filming. Mrs. Higgins left her memories of that time. "The Director, Alfred Green, came to the school and we children were brought to the front of the building. He randomly chose several boys and girls for the scenes to be shot that day. I was so surprised and elated when I was selected. I think it was because I stood out with my red hair. We were excused from school and we never grew tired of watching the scenes being filmed."

Another interesting facet of the production was that being a silent movie, there was obviously no sound. Back in the day, theaters employed piano players to play during the movies, using music to set the mood. In 2006, local musician, Logan Young composed and performed to record music to be incorporated into the film in authentic style of 1923. Logan just happened to be the grandson of Mrs. Mildred Higgins, a most appropriate choice.

Again, from Mrs. Higgins reminiscences, "The Episcopal Church, the Masonic Temple, the Baltimore Steamship Company, the Front Street docks were some of the places for scenes. The old Moose Lodge on Broad Street was the home of Thomas Meighan in the movie. The house just back of that was the Joseph Schenk home at 816 Prince Street. Lois Wilson's home in the movie was located there. The Winyah Indigo Society Hall, the Winyah School, the Wigwam Drug Store on the corner of Front and

Screven Streets and many other places on the waterfront, were used as the hero 'went away to sea and returned.'" During street scenes, many of the neighborhood homes and buildings can be identified.

"The best day of all was payday. We were lined up at the waterfront and handed crisp one dollar bills – brand new money. I think I had about twelve dollars in all. I felt like a millionaire because I never had that much money in all of my ten years! I used some of it to buy Christmas presents. What luxury!"

Today, the Pied Piper Malone DVD and the 2006 program are available at the Georgetown County Museum. Come by to purchase a copy and see if you can identify local buildings.