

Museum Around the Corner
The Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

George R. Congdon ©

One of the treasured items on display in the Georgetown County Museum is a handsome pocket watch. The story of how it came to be in possession of one of Georgetown's most revered citizens is somewhat of a mystery, but the life of the man is well known.

George Reynolds Congdon began life in Georgetown in the year 1837. His father moved here from Newport, Rhode Island prior to the birth of his son and engaged in the mercantile business at 701-703 Front Street, just next door to the Town Clock. From "A Walk Down Front Street", a thorough description of businesses on our main mercantile area, we learn, "The [War Between the States] often found families on opposite sides – some fighting for the South and some for the North. Such was the case with the Congdons. [In fact, William Prior Congdon, George's father found his loyalties lay with the Union. He returned to Newport for the duration of the war. He returned to business in Georgetown after the war, but spent his summers in Rhode Island, eventually settling permanently there.] According to an interesting story reported in the April 1, 1893, New York Times, Lieutenant J. W. Congdon was the executive officer aboard the U.S.S. Mingoe, which had been assigned to patrol the waters around Georgetown... On February 24, 1865, Lt. Congdon was in command of the Mingoe. As he approached the back of the Front Street stores he saw no life in town, so he ordered a shot from the forward 100-pounder fired over the town to awaken the inhabitants. He ordered a good elevation but before ordering fire, he jumped from the pilot house and approached the gun to check the sights. Jumping back, he exclaimed 'this gun is pointed at a store that is owned by my uncle. I have no grudge against the old man to the extent of being willing to toss a 100-pound Parrott shell in among his belongings. Just see that a little more elevation is given'. The greeting shot fired over the town resulted in an outpouring of women and children. Most of the men were away at war." The uncle mentioned was William Prior Congdon, father of George Reynolds Congdon.

George was a member of the Georgetown Rifle Guards which was organized in late 1859. This unit became Company A 10th South Carolina Regiment. According to Bud Black, local historian and researcher, George's service record shows him as a Private on the first Muster Roll, dated July 19, 1861, of Capt. P.C.J. Weston's 10th Regiment, South Carolina Volunteers. Congdon and his Regiment were in a string of battles: Corinth, Ms., Farmington, Ms., Munsfordville, Ky., Murfreesboro (Stone River), Tn., Chickamauga, Tn., Atlanta, Ga., Franklin, Tn. [at which "the slaughter was appalling"] and Bentonville, NC. Somewhere in this line of battles, George came into possession of a handsome pocket watch. It has been thought that he found it on the battlefield and was a possession of a Union soldier, but being a Quartermaster, it may be that he was very resourceful and may have made an astute "deal". How he got the watch will always be a mystery, but the family has handed the watch down to the current generation. Mr. Ronald D. Darnell received the watch belonging to his grandfather, and through Jeffrey D. Congdon of Indianapolis, Indiana, the watch has been given to the Georgetown County Museum. The maker is David Humbert, Geneva as noted on the dial.

After the war, George returned to Georgetown to continue in the shipping and mercantile business started by his father. He partnered with Benjamin I. Hazard, another Newport, Rhode Island transplant. Around 1881-1882, a line of three-masted schooners plied between New York and Georgetown. One was named the *B.I. Hazard* and another the *G.R. Congdon*. This latter ship was lost on January 31, 1901 off Cape Hatteras. All seven hands were saved.

The Georgetown Digital Library has a photo of the George R. Congdon family outside their home at 1003 Front Street, today known as the Kaminski House, an important house museum. Later, after the death of George on December 24, 1893, his widow, Adriana Seavey Congdon, built and lived in a beautiful Victorian mansion in 1903, still standing at 605 Prince Street.

From his obituary of December 30, 1893: In his every day life Capt Congdon displaced that gentleness and kindness which bespoke so clearly the beauties and excellencies of his true character as a gentleman, a friend and a citizen. His taking away removes another one of those links that binds us to the illustrious past but the good he has done will not be interred with his bones; they will live and shine with increasing luster as the years roll by and a host of his appreciative citizens and friends will always cherish for him that love and reverence which his blameless life so richly deserves.”