

Museum Around the Corner

Georgetown County Historical Society

One of the most enduring legends of Georgetown County is the story of the Gray Man. Although tales of this mysterious stranger vary, they all agree on the purpose of his appearances. He has come to warn Pawleys Island folk to flee the Island in the approach of a hurricane that could prove deadly.

There are at least four theories as to just who this harbinger of danger may be. Some say that he is the spirit of Percival Pawley, the original owner of the island and named for him. Also, he could have been a lone sailor who was once found washed up on Pawleys shores who clung to life for a brief time, but soon died after being found.

Another story is that of a young man who had been away on a long journey and had at last returned to South Carolina. Hurrying from Charleston to see his fiancée who was staying on Pawleys at the time, he chose to take a short cut across the marshy area between the highway and the island. As he and his servant rushed headlong into the countryside, he soon found himself plunging into a bog and began to sink. His servant could only stand by helplessly, not being able to find any method of rescue in time. The young man and his horse soon disappeared beneath the surface. The servant continued on to deliver the tragic news to the family. Days after the loss of the young lover, his fiancée strolled the beach finding no comfort in her grief. She looked up to see him standing upon a high dune, telling her to leave the Island as great danger approached. He disappeared as suddenly as he came. She rushed back to tell the story and being unable to console his daughter, the father bundled the family back to the plantation. The next day a storm struck with a fury that would leave no one alive on the island.

Is the Gray Man Enoch Arden? Julian Bolick, famed Georgetown author of [The Gray Man](#) and [Return of the Gray Man](#), relates this story. In the early 1800s, three childhood friends grew up together, two boys and a girl. As they reached maturity, one of the young men, Enoch Arden, proposed to the beautiful maiden. She accepted, and they were to be married upon his return from a trip. As the expected year for his return passed, no sign of his arrival came. After two more years, it was supposed he had been lost at sea, and the other young man confessed his love for her. The wedding was held one lovely afternoon. As the revelers and happy couple celebrated their marriage in the front yard of the plantation house, the sound of hooves came louder as a horseman approached. Finally, it was Enoch returning after being stranded following a shipwreck. As he dismounted, he realized what the scene before him meant. He briefly spoke to the couple, then remounted and galloped away, supposedly to Pawleys Island to throw himself into the ocean. Equally aggrieved, the young couple ran to the Waccamaw River, throwing themselves into the dark waters. None of the three survived.

In modern times, several sightings of a strange man on Pawleys Island prompted visitors to pack up and leave with the certainty that his appearance meant a terrible storm. In 1954, a young couple, honeymooning on Pawleys Island, were disturbed by a knock on the door just at dawn. As the young husband opened the door, a strange man, hat pulled low to cover his face and dripping with sea water, dressed in all gray, said, "The Red Cross sent me to tell you to evacuate immediately because of a bad storm coming". Wasting no time, the couple hastily departed. Later, as they encountered some Red Cross workers, they thanked them for sending the messenger to warn them. "No sir, we didn't send anyone." Could it have been the Gray Man?

Elizabeth Huntsinger has also collected many stories of sightings and possibilities of just who the Gray Man might be. We may never know for sure, but his legend is certainly one that had endured. If one wishes to stroll the beach on a rainy day in the hopes of seeing him, don't bother. He seems to know thrill seekers, and only appears to the unsuspecting. Those who have encountered him have returned after a hurricane to find that their house was left practically untouched while houses all around them are destroyed.