

Museum Around the Corner

Georgetown County Historical Society

Day dawned gray and breezy on Thursday, October 12, 1893 along the coast of Georgetown County. Families on Debordieu Island and Magnolia Beach observed tides rolling in when they should have been ebbing out. That was a day when the tide never changed. By sunset, the sea had an unusual glow to it, lit up as though it were aflame. Ominous black clouds formed and the night was stormy and windy. By dawn, the sea was at the door of the houses that has been built far back from the high tide line. The date was Friday the 13th of October, 1893. Oldsters called it the day that the ocean and the river shook hands.

On Debordieu, a ship had wrecked on the beach in the night, right in front of the house of Charlotte and Anna Allston, daughters of William Algernon Allston. Their great niece, Mary Ashe Lucas, was visiting and left a harrowing story of how that day was spent. By 10:00 am the sky had turned so black it seemed as midnight and the mountainous waves were crashing over the wreckage of the lost ship and threatening to break it apart, sending wreckage into the house. The women huddled in what was called the storm room. This had been built by their father after the hurricane of 1822. Anchored to an underground frame held together with pins, the storm room was 10 feet off the ground. It proved to be their salvation. The water was so deep in this room that the women had to stand for hours because the furniture was all under water, no place to sit. Later, the ship was torn apart, but floated miraculously by the house.

Further up the beach was Magnolia Beach, the enclave of the Flagg families. Four houses were built at the northern tip of what is today Huntington Beach. Dr. Arthur Belin Flagg, Sr., his wife Georgianna and sons Arthur and Ward, and several cousins were in one of the houses. Another house was occupied by Dr. Arthur Flagg, Jr., his wife Mattie LaBruce Flagg, five of their six children, two of Mattie's sisters and three servants. Dr. Joshua John Ward Flagg, known as "Ward" in an interview thirty years later still mournfully recalled the events of that day.

As the ocean marched right up to the house, the men took axes and cut holes in the floor so the water would come in and anchor the house preventing it from washing away. The roof later caved in, and everyone ran or swam to a huge cedar tree, clinging for dear life. As the day wore on, the water rose on the tree, engulfing all with each sweeping wave. Momentary relief was felt before the next wave hit. Strength waning, Dr. Flagg and his wife, Georgianna, clung to each other and the tree, and eventually succumbed to the beating of the treacherous water. Ward watched them float away, embraced forevermore. Most of the children never had a chance against the mighty forces and were lost early on. One young niece was braced into a crotch of the cedar tree with a floating board and was saved. Another kept being swept away, but Ward caught her and brought her back several times.

As suddenly as the storm came on, it suddenly blew over. In the span of an hour, the water began to recede, the sky cleared, and the sun shone. As the shock of the preceding hours began to wear off, the search for victims and survivors began. Dr. Flagg was found two days later in the mud, only a piece of his vest visible and his watch was still ticking. Because so many of the Flagg family perished, it became known as the "Flagg Flood".

On Debordieu, the house, apart from the storm room, had survived, but the bedroom where they had earlier taken refuge had been inundated by the water, insuring their drowning had they stayed. All furniture was ruined or swept away, and their clothing gone. The pet dog was found calmly sitting in a wooden washtub floating in one room and a cat was sitting on the rafters.

Dr. Flagg never married. He lived quietly at Spring Hill surrounded by fine antiques and portraits of his lost family. He spent the next forty five years ministering to the medical needs of his community and became a dear friend of Archer Huntington of Brookgreen Gardens. He quietly passed away at the age of 78 on May 8, 1938. Only one brother, Charles E.B. Flagg, was listed as a surviving member of his family. Our Museum displays his eyeglasses along with his mortar and pestle.